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# THERE WAS A KING IN EGYPT

BY

NORMA LORIMER

AUTHOR OF

"THE GODS' CARNIVAL," "A WIFE OUT OF EGYPT,"

"ON DESERT ALTARS," ETC., ETC.

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# PREFACE

THE monarch indicated in *There was a King in Egypt* is Akhnaton, the heretic Pharaoh, first brought home to the English reader by the well known Egyptian archæologist, Mr. Arthur Weigall. Akhnaton, or Amenhotep IV., has an interest for the whole world as the first Messiah. Like Our Lord, he was of Syrian parentage—on the mother's side. Our interest in him is undying, because underlying his Sun-symbolism we have the first foreshadowings of the altruism of Christianity.

The book is not directly devoted to Akhnaton. It is about a young English Egyptologist, who is excavating the tomb of Akhnaton's mother, in which the Pharaoh's exhumed body found its final repose; his sister; and an Irish mystic, who copies the tomb-paintings excavated before their freshness fades. Aton-worship and Mohammedanism have an almost equal fascination for this Irishman, and the romance is permeated with their mysticism. The prophecies of a Mohammedan saint who has attained the light by a life of abstinence and self-discipline, influence the current of the romance no less than the visions of the Pharaoh Messiah, whose pure religion threatened his country with disasters like the Russian revolution.

For the historical facts I am indebted to the brilliant *Akhnaton, Pharaoh of Egypt*,[1] of Mr. Weigall, late Chief Inspector of Monuments in Upper Egypt. The character of the Egyptian Messiah has fascinated me ever since I began to read Egyptian history, and Mr. Weigall writes with the grace and colour of a Pierre Loti. I have always used

[1] Published by Wm. Blackwood & Sons.

his translations of Akhnaton's words, and very often his own words in describing Akhnaton.

I take this opportunity of thanking Mr. Weigall for his ungrudging permission to quote from him, and I should like him to know that his book was the inspiration of *There was a King in Egypt.*

I must also acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. Walter Tyndall's fine volume, *Below the Cataracts,*—he is equally successful as author and artist—for my description of the tomb of Queen Thiy.

The teachings of the reformed Mohammedanism scattered through my book are derived from the propaganda works of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, especially his *Teachings of Islam.*

I trust that my readers will find the mysticism of the book not a clog upon the wheels of the romance of Excavation in Egypt, but Virgil's "vital breeze."

NORMA LORIMER.

7, PITCULLEN TERRACE, PERTH, SCOTLAND.

# THERE WAS A KING IN EGYPT

## *PART I*

### CHAPTER I

DAWN held the world in stillness. In the vast stretches of barren hills and soft sands there was nothing living or stirring but the figure of an Englishman, standing at the door of his tent.

At the hour of sunrise and sunset the East is its own. Every suggestion of Western influence and foreign invasion is wiped out. The going and the coming of the sun throws the land of the Pharaohs, the kingdom of Ra, the great Sun God, whose cradle was at Heliopolis, back to the days when Egypt was the world; to the days when the sun governed the religion of her people; to the days when civilization had barely touched the Mediterranean and the world knew not Rome; back again to the days when the Nile, the Mother of Life, bordered by bands of fertile, food-giving land, had not as yet sheltered the infant Moses in her reeds. Dawn in Egypt is the dawn of civilization.

Each dawn saw Michael Amory, wrapped in his thickest coat, standing outside his tent, watching and waiting for the glory of Egypt, for Ra, the Sun God, to appear above the horizon of the desert.

To stand alone, nerve-tense and oppressed by the soundless sands, and surrounded by the Theban Hills, in whose bosoms lie the eternal remains of the world's first kings, drew him so strongly that, tired as he might be with his previous day's work, he seldom slept later than the hour which links us with the day that is past and the morrow which holds the magic of the future.

For that half-hour only his higher self was conscious of

existence, and it was infinitely nearer to God than he was aware of. The silence of the desert and its simplicity, which to the complex mind of Western man is so mysterious, banished all material thoughts and even the consciousness of his own body, and left him a naked soul, alone in the world, encompassed with Divinity, a world whose hills and rolling sands had known neither labour nor strife, nor the despotism of kings.

For the dead Pharaohs, lying in their tombs under the hills, in the grandest monuments ever wrought by the vanity of man, were forgotten. His long days of labour in their depths might never have been. Man and his place in the universe were wiped out.

The cold was intense. Michael shivered and turned up the collar of his coat. A faint light had appeared on the horizon, a pale streak like a silver thread, which widened and widened until it spread into the higher heavens; with its spreading the indefinite forms of moving figures appeared—ghostly figures of dawn.

Michael knew that they would appear; he knew that, just as soon as the streak of light grew in width from a faint thread to a wider band, he would see them, dignified, stately figures, like white-robed priests, walking desertwards from the horizon to his tent.

Although he had seen the same figures every morning for some months, he was not tired of watching them. It always gave him pleasure to recall how vividly they had at first reminded him of the pictures, familiar to him as a boy, of the Wise Men following the star in the east. But these were not wise men coming to pay homage or bring presents to the Galilean Babe who came to be called the Prince of Peace; they were the Mohammedan workmen who were employed by the Exploration School to which Michael Amory had attached himself; their labour was confined to the rougher preliminary digging and the clearing away of the accumulation of sand and debris on sites which had been selected for excavation.

As the dawn slipped back and counted itself with the years that are spent and the first yellow gleam appeared in the sky, Michael saw the tall figures go down on their knees and press their foreheads to the sand. It was their third prayer of the day: devout Mohammedans begin their new day at sunset; their second prayer is at nightfall, when it is quite dark; their third is at daybreak.

Michael knew that the moment *el isfirar*, or the first yellow glow, appeared in the heavens, the white figures would turn to the east and perform their *subh*, or daybreak devotion. He knew that it would be finished before the golden globe appeared above the rim of the desert, for did not the Prophet counsel his people not to pray exactly at sunrise or sunset or at noon, because they might be confounded with the infidels who worshipped the sun? Yet it gave him a fresh thrill each morning to watch these desert worshippers prostrate themselves in undoubting faith before their omnipotent God. In the untrodden desert, with its mingling of sky and sand, their perfect trust and faith in Allah seemed a convincing and evident belief. At such times he forgot that these same men were the children of Superstition and that one and all of them were held in the bondage of *genii*. He also forgot that their performance of five prayers a day, which is the number prescribed for the devout, did not necessarily make them men of honour. A perfect trust in Allah gives a bad man a long rope.

As the figures drew nearer and the golden globe rested for one moment on the sands of the desert, for that one brief moment before its rays broke into the amazing splendour which is Egypt's, the world became less mysterious, more familiar. Things relating to the day's work forced themselves upon Michael's mind. His bath and breakfast and many other practical things began to usurp his thoughts, while the barking of dogs, the movement in the hut of the "boys," brought him back to the common, everyday life of the excavating camp.

While he was dressing he remembered that Freddy

Lampton's sister was to arrive that day. For a moment or two his mind was completely usurped with a vision of what the girl would be like. Subconsciously his manhood quickened.

Yet the very idea of a woman intruding herself upon their strange and exquisitely intellectual life—a life made healthy by the long hours of physical labour in the various portions of the excavation—slightly annoyed him.

Fleeting pictures of Lampton as a girl rose and faded before his eyes as he hurriedly shaved himself, slipped into his flannels and adjusted his necktie as punctiliously as though he were going to a tennis-party at Mena House Hotel. It is typical of Englishmen in the East that the young men in the excavating camps, and especially in the one to which Michael belonged, showed as much regard for their personal appearance and nicety of dress, even when their day's work was to be done in the bowels of the earth, down a shaft as deep as a mine, as they did in the golden days of their life at Oxford or Cambridge. Michael Amory was perhaps as a rule the least careful of the digging party, because he was by temperament a dreamer; and his friend, Freddy Lampton, knew that if he was not careful and on his guard he would become "a slacker." Freddy, in spite of his acknowledged ability as a scholar and Egyptologist, was practical and conventional in his methods and mode of living. Michael Amory had fits of exactness and fits of what he considered conventionality; he had also his fits of slackness, days in which Freddy Lampton would let his blue eyes rest on his carelessly-tied necktie, or on his shoelaces, which were an offence to his eyes. Freddy's exquisite delicacy of touch and his eyes, which were trained to a fine pitch of exactitude for minute detail, two characteristics essential for his work as an excavator, made it painful for him to be in the company of anyone who offended his sense of personal nicety.

But visions of Lampton's sister were to be dismissed. She would be good-looking, of course, because Freddy's

sister could scarcely be anything else; his blue eyes, clear colouring and sunlit hair would be beautiful in a girl. But Michael Amory had no desire to encourage any thoughts which gave woman a place in his mind. The very visualizing of Lampton as a girl, comical as it had been, had forced before his eyes another face and another form which he had been striving to forget. Whenever he was idle, and too often when he was busy over some piece of work which ought to have engrossed his entire thoughts, her haunting charm and beauty would suddenly become more real and vivid than the bright blues and greens and reds of the pigments on the white walls of the tomb upon which he was at work. With well-practised mind-control he had learned to pull down a blind on her vision, to blot it out from his thoughts. On this morning, when he was hurrying through his dressing so as to be in time for breakfast, always a matter of difficulty with him, even though he had many hours in which to put on his few clothes, he shrank from thinking about the arrival of the girl who was coming to live with her brother in this strange valley, which had been the underground cemetery for countless centuries of the tomb-builders of Egypt.

When he was almost dressed and the sun was high in the heavens and its power was beginning to warm the night-chilled valley, a stone was flung into his tent. "Come out, you lazy beggar! The coffee's getting cold."

It was Lampton's voice and Lampton's nicety of aim. He had not been up since dawn; his boy had only brought him his cup of early tea half an hour ago, yet he was bathed and shaved and as neatly dressed as the most fastidious woman could desire.

"Right-ho!" Michael shouted back. "Don't wait for me."

"I should jolly well think I won't! Who'd be such an ass?" There was the best of human fellowship in Freddy's voice, but he knew his friend too well to risk the chance of spoiling his coffee by waiting for him.

After stretching out his arms and opening his lungs to the fresh dry air of the newborn day, Freddy turned into the dining-room. The mess-room and common sitting-room of the camp was in a wooden hut. Lampton's bedroom was at the back of it, as was also the one which had been set apart for his sister; it by right belonged to the Overseer-General and Controller of the Excavations and Monuments of Upper Egypt. Margaret Lampton was to use it and her brother was to evacuate his room when the overseer announced that he was coming to pay one of his visits of inspection to the camp.

Michael Amory lived in a tent, as did one or two other Englishmen who in busy and prosperous years helped in the work of excavating. At the present moment they were slack, which meant that funds were low and there was no fine work to be done which necessitated the individual spade and pick work of European Egyptologists. A new site was being cleared, so that the work had consisted for some time of the first clearing away of sand and stones and the debris which had collected during the thousands of years that had passed since the tomb which Freddy hoped to discover had been carved in the bowels of the earth, and the Pharaoh had been laid to rest in it. At such times there was little work for experts to do, so the camp shrank and left Lampton, who was the head of it, and one of England's finest Egyptologists, alone with his native workmen.

He had allowed his old Oxford chum, Michael Amory, to join him on condition that he put in so many hours' work every day in connection with the excavations. Michael's stipulated work, the work which he had undertaken to do, was the making of exact copies of the mural paintings and decorations, such as Lampton required, and to help in the evenings to clean and sort and arrange the small objects which the workmen found each day. In the debris they often found amulets and small earthenware vases and minute pieces of broken pottery, the very smallest of which suggested theories as regards the period and history of

the monument. The texture of the glaze used, or the nature of the pottery itself, the small remnant of decoration on them, or the trademark on the broken base of a vase, all were valuable links in the chain of history, which is unfolding itself to the eager eyes of Egyptian exploration schools.

When Michael at last appeared, Freddy looked up from his bacon and eggs. "I say, Margaret comes to-night."

"Yes, I know."

Freddy raised his blue eyes and gave Michael one of his quick glances. "Remembered, did you?"

"Yes—the fact suddenly came into my head when I was shaving. I say, what are you going to do with her? Won't she be awfully bored?"

"Margaret doesn't know what the word bored means. Give her enough freedom and lots of sunshine—that's all she wants."

"Sounds the right sort."

"One of the best—old Margaret's all right!"

"Is she like you in appearance?"

"Good Lord, no!"

Michael's enthusiasm was damped. He wanted her to be like Freddy, to have his short, straight nose and his strong, rounded chin and beautiful mouth. For his looks were wasted on a man; Michael wanted to see them repeated and softened in a girl. As his eyes rested contemplatingly on his companion's bent head and youthfully-lean figure, he began to visualize a very plain, dowdy sister. The "Good Lord, no!" probably meant that although Freddy was not the least vain of his own extraordinary good looks, he could not help exclaiming at the idea of his dowdy sister being considered like him.

Michael had never seen her, because Freddy and Margaret had been left orphans when they were little children. They had been adopted by different relatives, so that Michael had never had the opportunity of meeting his friend's

sister while they were together at Oxford or when he visited Freddy in his uncle's home.

"Pass the marmalade!" said Freddy. "And I say, old chap, I wish you'd go and meet Margaret!"

Their eyes met as Michael handed him the marmalade, which was the one thing in the world which Lampton said he could not live without.

"Meet your sister?" Michael said. "I will, if you can't, but where?—and won't she expect you?"

"She ought to be on the ferry at five o'clock—I've made all the other arrangements, but I do wish you would meet her there and bring her up the valley. I simply can't, and Margaret knows that she is only allowed to come here on condition that her visit makes no earthly difference to my work. I daren't leave the men alone to-day—there's too much lying about. We are getting pretty 'hot' and they know it."

Michael looked up eagerly. "By Jove, is that so?"

"Getting hot" was expressive of getting close to a "find." It was the old saying which they had used as children when they played hide-and-seek.

"Yes, I think we are on the right track and I want to get ahead, so if you will go down to the ferry and fetch her up here I'll be awfully obliged to you."

"Right you are, old chap. I'll be there at five o'clock, and if she's not punctual I'll do a bit of sketching. You're sure everything else will be all right?"

"I don't think she'll be late, because she is to be in Luxor by eleven o'clock. She is to rest there until it gets cooler and Abdul is to bring her over the river from the hotel. The donkeys will be at the ferry to meet her. Mohammed is very anxious for her to ride his camel" (Mohammed was the sheikh of the district); "he thinks it more proper and fitting for my sister to make her entry into his district on a camel, but I don't feel certain that Margaret would appreciate the honour. He is keen to 'do her proud.'"

Good old Mohammed!" Michael said. "He has a great
e of dignity and convention."

And of hospitality," Lampton said. "He never forgets
t as the sheikh of the district he is its host as well."

That was all that was said about Margaret's arrival.
e two men lapsed into silence until breakfast was over.
they had been two women discussing the coming of a
n in their midst, there might have been more to say on
subject. In silence Freddy lit his cigarette and wan-
ed into Margaret's room. It was as bare and plainly
rnished as a convent cell or a room in a small log-hut in
frontier-camp in Canada—just the necessary bed and
ble, a washstand and one chair. It was scrupulously
an, and the white mosquito-curtain, which was suspended
om the roof and dropped over the little iron bed like a
ide's veil, gave the room a pleasant virginal atmosphere.
Freddy came back to the sitting-room, evidently satis-
ed. His quick eye had noticed that the "boy" had carried
ut his orders.

"Meg's an awful girl for books," he said, as he carried
ff a bundle of yellow-paper-bound French novels and one
r two volumes of the Temple Classics to her room.

"She'd better begin on this," he said, as he returned in
earch of still more. "She can't do better"—he lifted up
he weighty tome of Maspero's *Dawn of Civilization*.

"A bit dry, isn't it, for a beginner?"

"Not for Meg," Freddy said. "She can tackle pretty
stiff stuff. At college she used to suck the guts out of a
book like a weasel sucking blood from a rabbit."

"Blue stocking!" Michael said to himself. He abhorred
the type of ardent, eager, studious woman with whom he
had come in contact during his university life. "Able and
abominable," he called them.

In less than ten minutes the two companions had sepa-
rated; the one, with his paint-box and camp-stool in his
hand, made his way to the tomb where he was copying with
delicate and extraordinary exactitude the exquisite figures

and heads painted on the walls and pillars of the vast building; the other directed his steps to the site where the band of native excavators was already at work.

What a strange sight it presented in the brilliant morning sunshine! To the untutored eye nothing more or less than a vast rubbish-heap of sand and stones and broken rocks, with here and there patches of sparsely-clad natives working away with pickaxes and the tall figure of a white-robed *gaphir*, standing on a hillock of sand, watching them with unremitting care. On the sides of the vast ashpits long lines of "boys," toiling like ants up steep inclines, were carrying rush-baskets full of rubbish on their shoulders.

Yet these ignorant *fellahin* were playing their part, and an indispensable one, in laying bare to modern eyes the history of the world's first civilization. This vast rubbish-heap, where men with pickaxes and boys with baskets, full of the dust and sand of ages, toiled from dawn until sunset, would in the course of time yield perhaps to the Egyptologist one of the long-looked-for links in the lost centuries of Egypt's story, or be transformed into a wonderful picture-gallery of Egyptian art.

Nothing could look less inviting, less interesting, as Freddy approached it, for as yet there was little or nothing for the untutored eye to see but the debris of familiar desert rubbish. But Freddy Lampton knew otherwise. Only yesterday the most experienced of the workmen had struck something hard, something which told him that they had finished with loose sand and broken rocks and had struck the ancient handiwork of man.

The site chosen had been a mere conjecture on Freddy Lampton's part, a conjecture guided by scientific knowledge and careful research. He felt convinced that the tomb which they were looking for was close to the spot where they were working. Indications such as the excavator looks for had decided him to begin work on the site. The discovery yesterday had been nothing more or less than the first indication of a narrow flight of steps, cut in the virgin desert

rock, a stairway probably built by the tomb-builders for the use of the workmen, in order to carry away baskets of sand and rubbish without slipping.

The moment that the expert workman had come across this staircase, they had suspended work until "Effendi" had been sent for and found. Under his eye and partly by his own pickaxe, the little flight of embryo steps, with a very steep gradient, had been laid bare. In the vast expanse which the work covered, it seemed a very small thing, but the greatest underground temples—for the tombs are veritable temples—of Egypt, and some of the most wonderful of her monuments, have been discovered by far fainter clues. The little staircase, about twenty feet below the surface of the sand, was enough to fill the young Englishman's heart with hope. He had come upon man's handiwork—no doubt they would soon come upon more important masonry.

When all the workmen had saluted the Effendi with respectful salaams and returned to their common toil, Freddy Lampton addressed the native overseer. He was enveloped in a white woollen hooded cloak, for the heat of the day had not yet begun; he also wore a fine turban; while the *fellahin* who did the roughest work wore only white skull-caps and cotton drawers to their knees and full shirts of blue or white cotton, open from the neck to the waist. A few of the better-paid older men wore turbans of cheap white muslin, wrapped round brown felt skull caps, or fezes. The carriers of rubbish, who received the smallest pay of any, dispensed with the drawers as well as with the turban. In the sunlight their one garment, a blue or white shirt, stood out against the yellow sand as they wound their way in Indian file from the low level of the excavation to the place in the desert where they threw down their burdens.

The *gaphir* led his master a few steps from where the staircase had been excavated the day before and then bade him look down. Freddy's quick eye detected a horizontal line of masonry, the beginning of a strongly-built wall. The men had unearthed it that morning. It was only a nar-

row strip, but it would have been against the strictest rules to have excavated more without informing the "Effendi."

The *gaphir*, a splendid man and very reliable, adored his enthusiastic English master, whose good looks and well-bred, unfailing courtesy of speech alone would have made his personality irresistible to the Arab. Added to his good looks and to his manner of "one who is born to be obeyed," Freddy had courage and great ability and—best of all in the *gaphir's* eyes—a silent respect for the teachings of the Prophet.

After an inspection of the various points of excavation and a word of greeting here and there had been passed with upper workmen, those who had showed an intelligent interest in their work, Freddy returned to the exciting spot and with two or three men who had "fingers" and a "sense" of things, began his morning's picking.

While he worked away with youthful energy and an almost inspired intelligence, he could hear the toilers with the rubbish-baskets singing their monotonous chants. The word "Allah, Allah" came repeatedly to his ears. He had grown so accustomed to the words of their chants that he followed them subconsciously; the words "Allah, Lord of Kindness, Giver of Ease," rang out with monotonous persistence. Allah was to ease their burdens; Allah was to moisten their dry lips; the "Lord of the Worlds" was to hasten the time when the poor man might sit in the shade and smell the sweet scents of paradise and listen to the sound of running waters.

They chanted verses from the Koran as Jack Tars sing sea songs. In Mohammedan lands the song of Allah never dies.

Only occasionally Freddy heard the quaint words of some popular love-song, coming from the lips of one of the higher-class Arab workmen, a song as old as their tales of *The Thousand and One Nights*. One was drifting to his half-conscious ears at the moment; he was familiar with every word of it.

"A lover says to his dove, 'Send me your wings for a day.' The dove replied, 'The affair is vain.' I said, 'Some other day, that I may soar through the sky and see the face of the beloved; I shall obtain love enough for a year and will return, O dove, in a day.' The night! The night! O those sweet hands! Gather of the dewy peach! Whence were ye, and whence were we, when ye ensnared us?"

The Arab who was singing it was considered quite a musician amongst his fellow-workmen. He had earned his living for some years by singing love-songs on the small boats which drift up and down the Nile and in the cafés in Luxor. To English ears his talents as a singer would not have been recognized; the particular qualities which ensured the approval of his native audience would have caused much laughter in an English music-hall. Freddy Lampton, who knew something of Arab music, was able to recognize the singer's talents, but he was not near enough to hear the grunts of intense satisfaction and longing which the song was calling forth from the blue-shirted *fellahin*.

And so the hours of the morning wore on, until the sun was too powerful to allow even the natives to work, and Freddy Lampton wandered off to the tomb in which his friend was painting. The *fellahin* instantly untied the bundles which held their simple food and began their midday meal. Many of them prayed before eating; many of them did not.

When the meal was eaten, each man sought some vestige of shade, behind a mound of rock or an ash-heap of debris, or in the excavated channels of the site; there with full stomach and contented mind he would lay himself down to sleep, amid the heap of ruins which thousands of years ago had been the field of vast numbers of toilers, such as were he and his fellow-toilers, slaving for the glorification of an absolute monarch, whose kingdom was the civilized world. He cared not one jot nor tittle for what he had uncovered or what secrets the valley or hills had hidden from men for countless centuries. Filling baskets full of rubbish was his work,

his method of earning a living, and it mattered nothing to him whether the rubbish was culled from the golden sand of the most wonderful valley in the world, or thrown out of the filthy ashbins in the native city of Cairo. Toil was all one thing to him; it had no interest, it suggested no varieties. Allah had willed it. The clear blue sky and the sunlit hills, with their tombs and tombs and endless tombs stretching further and further into the western valley, they, too, were Allah's will, as were the dark, evil-smelling streets of the city, with their noise and the crowding of human and animal beasts of burden.

As Freddy approached Michael Amory a look of satisfaction spread over his face. "Mike," as he called him, was so busily engrossed in his work that he did not look up. He was making a delicate and extraordinarily exact reproduction on paper of a figure of an Egyptian King making offerings to an enthroned Osiris. No other artist had ever done the same work with his delicacy of touch and exactness of detail. The picture on his easel looked as if he had cut a square block out of the polished limestone which held the tinted relief of the King making the offering to the god, and set it upon his easel.

Freddy was proud of Michael and not a little surprised at the rapidity with which he had grasped the nature of his excavation work, which was not only the opening up of fresh monuments for the pleasure of the public, but the search after missing links and the verifying of well-founded conjectures. He knew that Michael had read a fair amount of Egyptian history, that he had specialized in one period, and that he had studied, in his own fashion, something of the mythology of ancient Egypt, but he was quite unprepared for the "sense" of the more serious part of the work which he had shown.

Besides which, Freddy knew more than Michael thought he did of the new distraction which had disturbed his mind.

About once in ten days Freddy found it almost necessary to go to Assuan or Luxor and there throw himself heart and

soul into the festivities of the foreign hotel society. For one night and half a day he played tennis and danced and was young again. These periodical outings and his private hobbies kept his mind and nerves well balanced. At his age it was scarcely healthy for a sport-loving, normal Englishman to spend his days and nights all alone, in the silent valley in the hills, his only companions the mummies of Pharaohs and the bones unearthed from subterranean tombs. But Freddy slept as happily and as soundly with mummies in his room and ancient skulls below his bed as he did in the modern, conventional bedroom of the big hotel at Assuan.

Michael had accompanied him to these dances, and Freddy had noticed that on each occasion he was very much engrossed by the company of an Englishwoman of whom he had heard a good deal that was ugly and unpleasant. He had long ago ceased to pay any attention to the scandals which were related to him each season about the English and American women who came to Egypt for the sake of the climate and for its hotel-society—ugly stories, generally greatly exaggerated, but often with a foundation of unsavoury truth in them. The sands of Egypt breed scandals as quickly as the climate degenerates the morals of shallow-minded tourists. But this woman Freddy knew to be as dangerous as she was charming; and he also knew the enthusiastic nature of Michael and how it was temperamental with him to place all women on pedestals and worship them as pure, high beings, far above mere men. Fallen idols never shattered his belief; they were simply forgotten.

Since Michael had met the beautiful Mrs. Mervill, Freddy had noticed that he had fits of abstraction, and that instead of working overtime, as was his habit, he was now as prompt as the *fellahin* to "down tools" at the precise moment.

Freddy "had no use" for the woman. His practical mind had summed her up at a glance. But he was afraid that his friend might drift into a very undesirable friendship with her. She would enjoy his simplicity, for he seemed to have been born without guile, while his intellectual fascination

was not to be denied. Michael was generous, impetuous and reckless.

"I'm not going to disturb you," Freddy said. "We'll meet at lunch."

"Right-ho!" Michael said. "I've almost finished."

"Looks as if you'd blown the thing on to the paper this time," Freddy said. "Gad, it's topping!"

Michael said nothing, but he glowed inwardly. A word of enthusiastic praise from Freddy was worth all his morning's toil in the breathless, stuffy tomb-chamber of the Pharaoh whose embalmed remains it contained.

Freddy returned to his hut and flung himself down in a cane lounge-chair in as cool a spot as he could find. He picked up a French novel and lit a cigarette.

Lying there, in his white flannels, reading *Marie Claire*, who would have thought that he was one of the most able Egyptologists of the day, of the younger school, or that he controlled so important a section of the English School of Archæology in Egypt?

Meanwhile the simple meal was being laid with a neatness and convention which was a striking contrast to the wooden hut and scarcity of furniture in the room. The Arab who was setting the table was a perfect parlourmaid, a product of Freddy's teaching. The only thing Freddy was proud of was his ability to train and make good servants. Mohammed Ali's table-waiting really pleased him. He thought Meg would approve of him. He was an intelligent lad and proud of his English master, who seemed to think that telling a lie for the sake of being polite or kind was really a sin. In fact, the Effendi was very rarely cross, except when Mohammed forgot and told a lie. Sometimes it was very hard to tell the truth, when a lie would, he knew, make his master happy. While he set the table he felt his master's eyes were on him, even though he was reading a love story which was so beautiful that he had seen, or thought he had seen, tears in the eyes of Effendi Amory, when he was reading it the night before.

Freddy was not finding the beautiful story of the Frenchwoman so interesting as Mohammed Ali imagined. He had allowed the days to pass, with all their engrossing interest, without giving much thought to Margaret's coming or what she would do with herself, or how her presence would affect their daily life.

Now in a few hours she would be with them. This was, in fact, his last meal alone with Mike. He had never bothered about the matter because Meg was such a good sort and so jolly well able to amuse and look after herself. The days had just passed, and now she was coming, Meg, who was his best friend in the whole world, Meg, who in his eyes had the mind of a boy and the sympathy of a woman.

## CHAPTER II

At five o'clock Michael Amory, true to his word, was down at the ferry, awaiting the arrival of Margaret Lampton. The ferry-boat was pulling across the Nile; he would soon be able to distinguish her. In all probability no other Englishwoman would be crossing to the western bank of the river at so late an hour. Tourists who came to visit the Colossi of Memnon, whose song to the dawn never dies, or to "do" the ruins of the Hundred-Gated city of Thebes, came much earlier in the day.

While the boat was drifting slowly across, Michael's eyes rested lovingly on his surroundings. If the girl was appreciative of Nile scenery, how greatly it must be impressing her!

Boats, like white birds with big crossed wings, flew past him on the pale blue river. Heavy, flat-bottomed barges, coming up from the pottery factories, laden with jars which were to be used for the building of native houses, drifted past, with their well-stacked, squarely-built cargoes piled high like stacks of grain. One barge, with a wide brown

sail, was full of fresh green melons. Across the river, on the opposite bank, bands of women, enveloped in black and walking in Indian file on the yellow sands, carrying water-jars on their heads, were wending their way to their mud villages. The gleam of their metal anklets caught the sunlight.

But the ferry-boat was drawing close to the bank; the next minute he would be able to distinguish Freddy's sister, with Abdul in attendance. The other passengers, with native politeness, were already making way for the English *Sitt* and her servant to go ashore.

Michael hurried forward to greet her. Margaret's blue veil hid her features until he was quite close to her.

"I'm Michael Amory, I live with your brother," Michael said. "I have come to bring you to his camp. He was too busy, or he would have been here himself—he asked me to apologize to you."

Margaret's long firm fingers gave Michael's outstretched hand a grateful grasp. Michael, whose sensibilities were very near the surface, lost nothing of the girl's meaning. A feeling of relief soothed his anxiety.

"How awfully kind of you to come!" she said. "I knew Freddy would be busy, digging up something that was once somebody, four thousand years ago."

"That's about it," Michael said. "As I could be spared and he couldn't, he asked me to look to your arrival and bring you to the camp."

Abdul had hurried on to see that the donkeys were properly harnessed and all in good order for the long ride across the plain and through the immortal valley.

"Are you excavating too?" Margaret asked.

"I'm allowed to do a little 'picking' under your brother's eyes, but my real job is painting. I'm only dabbling in archæology as yet."

"Painting in connection with his School of Excavation?"

"Yes. Sometimes it is necessary to make almost instant

copies of the excavated paintings, while the colours are fresh and the text legible."

"Isn't it all awfully interesting?" the girl asked. "I feel almost afraid to come in amongst you, for I know literally nothing about Egyptology. I've only once been in the Egyptian section of the British Museum, and that's the sum total of my knowledge."

"You will have to learn. Your brother put a huge tome of Maspero's *The Dawn of Civilization* in your room this morning; he means you to start right away."

"Good old Freddy!" Margaret said, and as she smiled, Michael for the first time saw her likeness to her brother; it had escaped him before, because Freddy was very fair and Margaret was duskily dark. He could see that even through her blue veil. When she smiled and showed the same sharp-looking, well-formed teeth, as white as porcelain, Michael knew that if the girl had only been fair instead of dark, she would be almost the exact duplicate of her brother. But the expression of her grey-brown eyes was different; they were steadfast, calm eyes, which moved more slowly; they were softer than her brother's.

This Michael could scarcely see, screened as she was by her veil. But her firm handshake and the long unflinching gaze of her "How do you do?" told him why Freddy always spoke of his sister in tones which implied that she was as reliable as a man and a "topping pal."

They had reached the spot where the donkeys were waiting for them. Margaret's was a fine, well-bred animal, called Sappho, with a skin as smooth as a white suède glove; it stood almost as high as a mule. Her saddle, too, was a new one, and well-fitting—Freddy had seen to that. The old Sheikh, who was turbaned and robed after the manner of Moses or Aaron, was presented to her. His pale grey camel was waiting for him at a little distance from the donkeys. It looked very dignified, with its white sheepskin flung over the saddle and its fine assortment of charms. Little tufts of thick hair had been left on its thighs and at its

knees and neck; the artist who had clipped it had evidently admired the fancy shaving of some resplendent French poodle.

Margaret felt oddly important and very shy. Such a cavalcade seemed to have come to meet her. Her attempts at polite rejoinders to the old Sheikh's graceful and flattering speeches of welcome had all to be passed through Abdul, who probably delivered them in a more gracious form than Margaret was capable of expressing them. Abdul was quite accustomed to the abrupt and mannerless ways of the foreigners and to their crude speech; he knew that it meant no offence nor indicated any lack of gratitude or graciousness.

The Sheikh expressed his willingness to put his camel at Margaret's disposal, but as her brother had told him that the honourable *Sitt* would probably prefer to ride a donkey, all he could do was to again assure her that it would bestow honour on him if she would ride it, or in the future make use of it whenever she felt disposed. That is what Margaret made out of the endless, elaborate speeches which were translated to her.

At last they were all mounted and on their way. Margaret found it very difficult to keep up any sort of conversation with her companions, for her boy, anxious to do honour to his mistress's donkey, kept Sappho well ahead of Michael Amory's mule. She had only been one week in Egypt, so everything which she passed was still an object of interest and curiosity, but fortunately almost everything explained itself to her, like the illustrations of a book of the Old Testament.

They had turned their backs on the river, with its boats and birds and beasts and drum-beating and yelling *fellahin*, and were now in the silence of the green plain, where the blue-shirted *fellahin* were working knee-deep in the new crops. The inundation was just over, and the banks of the Nile were as bright as two long velvet ribbons of emerald green.

And now they were off the plain and had passed the Temple of Kurneh and the little Coptic village, which was the last link with civilization until their long ride up the valley terminated in the Excavation Camp.

In the valley they rode side by side, for the donkey-boy's enthusiasm had distinctly abated. Margaret did not konw anything about the valley, beyond the fact that it was called the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings. She had not yet "done" any tombs, as she had not come up the Nile by boat —it was cheaper and quicker for her to do the journey from Cairo to Luxor by train. So far she had not been in the hands of Cook. Freddy had told her that the money she would have to spend on the steamer she could spend better later on, and she would be more able to appreciate the tombs and temples, which most tourists see when they know too little about things Egyptian to appreciate them.

Knowing nothing of the story of the great valley, it was interesting to Michael to watch the effect it had on the girl —its extraordinary silence and its atmosphere of profound mystery. Their attempt to talk to each other soon failed, for Margaret was no good at either banter or small talk.

For the time being the valley, with its barren cliffs rising higher and higher on each side of her, and its world of soft pink light, held her. The wide cliff-bound road, which wound its way like a white thread through a maze of light and sun-pink hills, seemed to be leading her further and further into the heart of Egypt, to the very bosom of her children's ancient kingdom.

Margaret was totally ignorant of the fact that the tombs which give the valley its modern name lay in all their desolate splendour in the bowels of the earth, under the cliffs on either side of her. Her sense of the valley was not mental, it was not derived from books or a knowledge of Egypt's history.

Why it so affected her she could not imagine. It did not depress her so much as it awed her. The light on the hills was the light of happiness, and the blueness of the clear sky

banished all idea of sadness which a valley called the Valley of Tombs might have suggested. Yet it did affect her so profoundly that she accepted the idea that in entering this valley of desolation she was entering on a new phase of her existence. She felt suddenly older and wiser and strangely apprehensive.

The Sheikh, on his swaying camel, riding on ahead, the donkey-boys, with their fleet limbs and blue shirts clinging to them as they ran, were becoming immortal in her memory. Years would never efface the picture. Only Michael Amory and herself, in their European clothes, had no place in it. They were intruders.

Not a bird crossed their path, not a falcon circled over the tops of the cliffs. On the Nile thousands of birds had looked black against the sunlight as they came to the great river to drink.

"Why does this valley, with its pink sunlight, make talking out of the question?" Margaret at last said. "Please forgive me if I am a very poor companion."

Michael, who had been glad that she had not spoken—he would not have liked her so well if she had—said, "Please don't feel compelled to talk. I came to help you if you needed help, not to bother you or spoil your enjoyment."

"Thank you," she said. "I simply couldn't talk. Does one enjoy Egypt?" she asked the question pertinently.

They rode on in silence again and Michael was pleased that temperamentally she seemed to "feel" Egypt. There had been no suggestion of psychic influence in her very evident acceptance of the power of Egypt—just a simple awe, which was to Michael absolutely natural.

Presently she said, "Does my brother live all alone in this valley?"

"Practically alone, for some months in each year. I am with him just now, and in the daytime there are the workmen. At night he is alone with his two Sudanese house-servants; but he is well protected—his watch-dogs sit round

his hut and nothing human would dare venture near them after dark."

Margaret tried to laugh. "Dogs!" she said. "Dogs couldn't keep off this"—she indicated the valley.

Michael knew what she meant. Not a green blade of grass, not the smallest patch of herb was visible. To Margaret they seemed to be floating rather than riding through the pink light of another world.

"No, not this," Michael said. "But your brother's a marvel. I couldn't do it. Yet even he has to leave it now and then; sometimes he spends a night in frivolling in Luxor or Assuan."

As the vision of Luxor hotels, with their company of fashionably-clothed and overfed tourists, rose up before the girl, she laughed more naturally. But in the valley her laughter sounded wrong; she quickly hushed it.

"Fancy Luxor hotels after this! It certainly is going to extremes—personally, their society would bore me, but I should think that it was good for Freddy."

"Quite necessary," Michael said. "And he's awfully popular at the dances. I often wonder what some of his partners would say if they could see him as I do, pick in hand, down in the bowels of the earth or under the blazing sun of the desert, for days and days on end! Your brother's quite wonderful."

"I'm longing to see him at work," Margaret said. "I think his life sounds most exciting and interesting."

"Don't expect too much—it is amazingly interesting, but we don't open a tomb of Queen Thi every day."

"What tomb was that? Something very special?"

"Yes, very." Michael said the words very simply, but it struck him as odd that Freddy's sister should never have even heard of the tomb of Queen Thi. "At the present time he has just unearthed a small staircase in the sand and a bit of a brick wall, which may lead to the tomb he is looking for, or they may end in nothing, for sometimes the ancient tomb-builders began to dig and work upon a tomb and eventually

abandoned the site as hopeless—the sand was too soft, which meant the constant falling of sand before they struck a foundation of rock, or for some other reason—so after days and days of excavating we find that the whole thing is a fraud, just the mere beginning of a tomb which was never finished. Then other times he finds a tomb and after endless work at it—you can't imagine how much work it entails—he discovers that it was robbed of every single thing of value, probably by the sexton who was in charge of it when it was first built—all the jewels and scarabs and things had been looted; probably they were stolen only a few weeks after the mummy was laid in it."

Margaret remained silent. She was thinking and thinking, new and bewildering thoughts were rushing through her mind. Before she could in the least appreciate this new life what a lot she had to learn!

"An excavator's life isn't a bed of roses—it doesn't consist of picking up jewels and mummy-beads and beautiful amulets and rare scarabs and valuable parchments in every tomb which is opened. It's hard, hard work, with any amount of boring, minute detail and scientific work attached to it."

Margaret thought for a moment. To speak at all upon a subject of which she knew absolutely nothing was not in her nature.

"Shall we pass any tombs? Where are they?" She had expected to see some ruins of fallen buildings, or monuments which resembled the tombs in "The Street of Tombs" at Athens—these were familiar to her from photographs. Here there was absolutely nothing, nothing to suggest that great tombs had ever been there.

"They are below us," Michael said, "and all around us, under these pink rocks, buried like coal-mines. Where your brother is digging just now the site is rather different—it is flatter and less beautiful; it is in a small side valley. They were terribly anxious to hide themselves, poor things, to get away from robbers."

"Oh, I'm so glad I came!" Margaret said, irrelevantly, and the deep sigh she gave terminated their conversation.

Michael knew quite well the nature of her thoughts and the turbulent fight for expression which they must be causing her. No creature as sensitively attuned as he judged her to be could journey for the first time unmoved through the valley which to him summed up the word Egypt. He allowed her to ride a few paces ahead, just behind the Sheikh. The camel's arrogant head, with its supercilious gaze, towered above them. To Margaret, Michael Amory and herself were still an offence in the valley. The camel, with the high-seated, turbaned Sheikh, seemed a part of the whole. The animal, with its prehistoric loneliness of expression, the Sheikh, with his splendid deportment and benign loftiness of manner, suited the dignity of their surroundings. The camel's gaze, as its head reached up higher and higher to view some object which interested its supercilious mind, made Margaret feel very small and vulgarly modern. She was glad that she was riding a humble ass. The way the Sheikh rode his haughty animal provoked her admiration; it was to her after the manner in which the British aristocracy treat their powdered and silk-stockinged menservants.

Margaret felt more at ease on her white donkey, just as she felt more at ease with pleasant English maidservants than with pompous powdered footmen. It was a ridiculous simile, but it is the ridiculous which invades the mind in sublime moments.

While Margaret was finding pleasure in watching the camel and the Sheikh, or rather, while they were taking their place in her mind with the air and the sky and the hills and the valley, Michael was certainly enjoying himself in a more definite criticism of Freddy's sister. He remembered his friend's remark, "Oh, Meg's all right," and he knew what he meant.

Her long limbs and boyish figure delighted his artistic eye, while the white topee hat, with the long blue veil, failed

to hide the attractive carriage of her head. He felt impatient to see her unhatted and unveiled. Certainly she was not dowdy, nor had she any aggressive cleverness about her. Indeed, there was something which suggested a man's directness of mind and a simplicity which was quite unusual and fascinating. He could almost have laughed aloud when he thought of the picture which he had conjured up to himself of the Meg who could "tackle pretty stiff stuff and suck the guts out of a book like a weasel sucking the blood out of a rabbit."

The dowdy "blue stocking" had vanished, and in her place was a girl as attractive in her darkness as Freddy was in his fairness.

And so they rode on and on through the Theban hills, bathed in pink sunlight. The donkey-boys had fallen behind. Their first enthusiastic effort to show off before the honourable *Sitt* had quite subsided. They were discussing her now, in none too delicate a fashion. The elder of the two boys, who was the son of a dragoman, and hoped one day to develop into as resplendent a being as his father, was in his way a great reader. He had just finished an Arabic translation of a French novel and he was picturing to his friends Margaret as the heroine of the obscene romance. Poor Margaret!

In Egypt the Arabic translations of low-class French romances, rendered even more unclean by their translation, have a poisonous effect upon the minds of the youths who devour them. Margaret, who had admired the boy's brilliant smiles and beautiful features and teeth, which were even whiter and more attractive than her brother's, little dreamed, as they fell behind and talked together, of the nature of their conversation.

Their blue shirts looked like turquoise in the sunlight, and their little white crochet skull-caps showed to advantage the fine outline of their dark heads. They were certainly handsome young rascals, with an inherited grace of manner.

How her clean, healthy mind would have abhorred and hated them if she had understood their ceaseless chatter! It was like the noise of starlings on a spring morning. In Egypt, where ignorance is bliss, it is certainly folly to be wise. In the East, the inquiring mind, especially in domestic matters, is often its own enemy.

To Margaret, Egypt held for the time being nothing which was unclean or unlovely, nothing which was bettered by ignorance. She was lost in its light and mystery. In the Theban valley it seemed as if she would live on light, that it would supply food for both soul and body. In Egypt God is made manifest in the sun.

## CHAPTER III

Margaret had been shown over the "estate"; her modest luggage had been deposited in her bedroom, in which she was now standing, with her arm linked in her brother's.

When she had approved of everything and had told him about her journey, she gave his arm a little hug.

"Oh, Freddy, it's good to be with you again! You were a brick to let me come."

Freddy slid his arm round her shoulders and pressed her closer to him.

"It's topping having you, old girl, but you mustn't mind if I leave you an awful lot alone—I can't help it."

"I know you can't, and if I stew up a bit, you may find work which I can do. I'd love to help."

"Oh, don't fear—I'll find lots for you to do."

She looked at him eagerly, with a touching humility. "What sort of work?"

"Cleaning and sorting out the small finds which the workmen bring in each night, and you could help Mike to do some copying—it's not difficult, and sometimes the colours

vanish when they are exposed to the light. He can't get the things done all at one time."

"I see," Margaret said, but in her mind there was a horrible jumble.

"Sometimes I want Mike to help me—we're awfully short of hands just now—I mean, for hands that you can absolutely trust, so if you get into the thing you could do some of Mike's work and let him off."

"I'd love to, and you know my capability as well as anyone, so if you think I could I'll do my best."

"You'll soon know as much as Mike did when he came here, and your painting's all right."

"How nice Mike is!" she said simply.

"He's one of the best."

"Is he going to make Egyptology his profession?"

"I don't know—I don't think so. I'm afraid it's just another bit of Mike's drifting."

"What a pity!" Margaret was practical.

"I tell him it's time lost—at his age he ought to be at the job he means to succeed in."

"Isn't he taking this up in earnest? He seems to love the life."

"He does love the thing, but the detail of the work, with all its exactitude and rules and regulations, bores him. You'll understand better later on." Freddy opened a copy of the annual report of the British School of Archæology in Egypt and pointed to pages and pages of written records, outline drawings, measurements and diagrams and plans of tombs and excavations, even accurate copies of small pieces of broken vases and plates and jars—almost everything which had been dug up was carefully recorded; nothing seemed too small or incomplete to be of value.

Margaret looked at it wonderingly. What was all the labour for? Some day would she, too, understand the meaning of it and the use of such scraps and atoms of ancient pottery? Freddy digging out beautiful objects for the British Museum, statues and scarabs, wonderful jewels and

necklaces of mummy-beads, was what she had visualized, but of all this she had never dreamed.

She put her finger on the outline drawing of a small fragment of pottery with the tracing of a tiny sprig of some plant on it. Her eyes said "What good can that be?"

Freddy read her meaning. "That small piece of pottery may have shown that foreign vegetation was introduced into the district. It is a new leaf, not met with before. It was probably sent for identification to the Botanical Department of University College in London. Sometimes little things like that give rise to heated discussions and theories. Some excavators won't draw on their imagination—they will have nothing but hard facts; others start a theory which sounds far-fetched—often it comes out correct."

"Realistic and Imaginative Schools!"

"That's about it. The middle way is generally the soundest. The excavator without imagination never gets very far, whereas the man who is apt to let his imagination run wild gets on the wrong track and it's hard to get him off; he overlooks things that won't fit in with his theory."

"I had no idea archæology involved all this—you're awfully clever, old boy."

"It's unending work and extraordinarily far-reaching, as it's done to-day. In the early days the horrors that were committed in the way of excavating were too awful."

"You work like detectives now, it seems to me, following up the smallest threads and links."

"That's it," Freddy said. "We are just a body of intellectual detectives, running to earth the history of Egypt and the story of the ancient world. We're really far more interested in finding connecting links and establishing disputed facts, than in unearthing statues and figures which please the public. Egyptologists have unearthed the private lives of Egypt's kings and queens."

"I suppose your friend Mike only enters into the artistic side of it?"

"Not altogether—he's awfully keen about Egyptian his-

ty of dress, too, pleased her critical inspector. It was fastidiously simple and fastidiously worn. In this again she was one with her brother.

When English news had been discussed, their talk turned again to Egypt. Margaret greatly desired to study Arabic; but although her brother could speak it extremely well, she knew that he had no time to teach her. It amazed her how much he had had to learn and had learned during his years in Egypt. It was after twelve o'clock when the trio parted for the night.

When Meg was alone in her room, a certain reaction set in; she felt tired and just a little depressed. She wanted to do so much and she knew so little. Beyond the name Rameses she had not recognized the name of one of the kings her brother had mentioned during their conversation that evening—indeed, she had failed to grasp the meaning of almost everything he had said, and yet she knew that he was talking down to her level, or thought he was.

Bewildered with the sense of Egypt, she fell asleep and dreamed of the valley and her wonderful ride.

## CHAPTER IV

Margaret had lived in the valley for a little over three weeks, immortal weeks of intense interest and new impressions. She had fitted herself into the atmosphere with a charm and adaptability which left Michael and Freddy wondering how they had ever got on without her. A woman in the hut made all the difference; a feeling of "homeness" now pervaded the camp. Margaret had found so much to do in the way of adding obvious touches of comfort and convenience to the hut and to the tents that she had found little or no time to start upon her studies of Egyptology.

The moonlight nights she had spent either in the company of her brother or Michael, wandering about the valley,

or sitting alone outside their primitive home, absorbing the spirit of the desert. She had not felt ready for book-learning.

One evening, after dinner, Michael and she had ridden down the valley and back again, repeating her first journey, so that she might enjoy it by moonlight.

The three weeks had done a great deal to help her to distinguish some of the periods and terms in connection with her brother's work. The word Coptic, for instance, had now its proper significance in her mind, and the terms dynasty and century were no longer jumbled hopelessly together. She also realized that Egypt had been governed by kings and queens with strong individualities of their own; they were not all spoken of by Egyptologists as "Pharaohs," a word which hitherto had suggested to Margaret the title given to the hosts of nameless and half legendary monarchs who ruled over a semi-Biblical kingdom.

Thus far and no further had she gone in the story of the world's first civilization; but she had gone further in her friendship with Michael Amory and in her knowledge of things Mohammedan. He had helped her to unravel the skein of difficulties which Egypt's three distinct and widely-different civilizations had presented to her—the period of ancient Egypt, the period which we now call Coptic or Early Christian, and the period of the Arab invasion, with its importation of a Mohammedan civilization. Traces of all these distinct civilizations and religions perpetually come to light in the work of excavation. Nothing puzzled the girl more than the fact that while digging on an ancient Egyptian site, her brother seemed to find Christian and Mohammedan relics. But even when he was speaking of interesting events in comparatively modern Egyptian history, which he took for granted she would appreciate and understand, Margaret felt disgracefully ignorant.

So Michael took her in hand and he thoroughly enjoyed the work of helping her to grasp some of the essential points which would clear her mind before she started upon

her serious reading. She had begun taking lessons in Arabic with Michael, who could speak it fluently but could neither read nor write it, the written and spoken language being entirely different.

Margaret's quickness astonished him. He was ignorant of her record at college.

He was now having an example of her capacity for learning, which she did at a pace which rather unnerved him. Margaret learnt a language as she learned the geography of a city. She would quietly and composedly study a map until the "sense" of the city was in her brain. In beginning her study of Arabic she explained to her brother that she must first of all try to grasp the "sense" of the language.

"I want a map of it, Freddy—you know what I mean."

And Freddy did know. The Lampton type of brain was familiar to him, and his own method of absorbing languages, or any of the subjects which he had had to study for his examinations, was exactly similar to Margaret's, so he set Michael and their Arabic master on the right track.

As a rule, the Arabic alphabet takes a student about three weeks to learn. Margaret, with apparently very little trouble, mastered it in one; it took Michael almost a month. Yet Margaret knew that she was not grasping things with any ease or quickness; she felt too unsettled and impatient. She was "dying," as she expressed it, to push on with Arabic so as to be able to talk to the natives and understand things Mohammedan, but the very fact that Arabic was not going to help her to read Egyptian hieroglyphics, or understand anything at all about ancient Egypt, acted as an irritant to her brain, and retarded her working powers.

"And when my brain is annoyed, or it feels impatient," she said, "bang goes my poor intelligence—it simply won't be hurried; it will only work in its own deliberate way."

Michael declared that the way it was working was good enough for him—rather too good, in fact.

Under such circumstances, the intimacy between Mar-

garet and her brother's best friend naturally ripened very quickly. Margaret felt as though she had known him for months instead of weeks, and more than once she had wondered what life would be like without him. He was much more imaginative than Freddy and more intellectually excitable and curious. He theorized and perhaps romanced where Freddy was apt to accept only proven facts. Michael's temperament was the exact stimulant which Margaret's brain required.

That Michael did his share of hard work Margaret had realized when she accompanied him one day to the scene of his labours. She had had to bend almost double and crawl down a steep shaft, of slippery, sliding debris, to what she thought must be halfway through the world, and pick her way over the rubbish in a semi-excavated chamber in the vast tomb. Some of the chambers were full of huge stones, which had fallen in with the roof. It was in a smaller chamber, where the heat was so great that she could scarcely breathe, that Michael spent his mornings and the greater part of his afternoons.

The heat of Egypt, concentrated for centuries and centuries, seemed to scorch Margaret's face when she entered it. The building was like a temple with side chapels. In one side chapel Michael sat himself down to copy a wide band of gaily-painted decorations, which formed a dado round its three walls.

. . . . .

On this particular night Margaret had returned from a long walk with Michael. They had left the low level of the valley and its winding white road and had climbed up on to the heights of the Sahara. It had pleased Margaret to feel that her feet were pressing the sands of the great African desert. She had never dreamed that their valley was actually a rift in the rocks of the Sahara, that ocean of sand which travels on and on to infinity.

They had stood side by side on its high ridge, with their

eyes looking towards the plain below, the historic plain which once held the capital of the world. The plain of Thebes reached to the river, and across the river lay gay Luxor, with its lights and the luxuries of modern civilization.

Their walk was finished. It had drawn them still closer together. The solitude of the Sahara, with its sense of Divinity, had established a new link in their sympathies; it had created a feeling between them similar to that which is the outcome of two people having been together through strenuous and trying circumstances. They had, as usual, spoken very little; yet they were conscious of having enjoyed each other's society intensely and in the best possible manner, the enjoyment of complete understanding.

Earlier in the evening, when Michael asked her to go for a walk, because Freddy was absorbed in some business letters, he had made the proposal in his habitual way.

"May I come and keep silence with you to-night in the great Sahara?"

And Meg had said, "Yes, do. You know, we really talk to each other all the time—my mind has so much more the gift of speech than my tongue."

And so their silence had been as golden as the sand at their feet, which under Egypt's moon never pales.

Freddy was only too glad that Michael had "cottoned on to Meg," as he expressed it—in fact, he was extremely pleased, for Meg would drive "the other woman" out of his thoughts, and if anything should come of it—well, Mike was one of the very best; Meg could not have a better husband.

But so far no such thought had entered Mike's head, nor yet Margaret's. She was too interested and busy in her new life to think of love; she was only conscious of living as she had never lived before, and as she would have asked to live if she had possessed a wishing-ring. Every hour and minute of her days were a delight. To be with her best "pal" Freddy in Egypt seemed too good to be true, and added to that, there was this unexpected pleasure, the

friendship and companionship of the nicest man she had ever met. His rather "drifting" temperament and nature appealed to her as it appealed to Freddy, for the very reason, perhaps, that keenly sensitive as she was and susceptible to her surroundings, her nature and brains were of a practical order. She was not imaginative or moody.

She loved to listen to Michael's vivid, unpractical, Utopian theories and to follow him to where his flashes of brilliance carried him. His dream cities and dream people delighted Margaret. He told her stories as she had never been told stories before, invented as he went along, stories which kept her one minute fighting against tears and the next in delicious laughter.

Margaret never could tell stories, not even to little children; she was not gifted with a creative brain or ingenuity.

On the heights of the Sahara they had not broken the silence; it was only on their return journey, under a canopy of southern stars, that Margaret had said:

"A short story, please."

And Michael had told her a story about a certain king of Egypt who had a beautiful slave, who had such power over him that she could make him do anything she liked. The things she liked were more fantastic than anything Margaret had ever read in *The Arabian Nights*.

## CHAPTER V

Now, on her lounge-chair in front of the hut, Margaret was resting after their walk. Freddy and Michael were both indoors.

Half an hour or perhaps more might have passed, when suddenly a luminous figure stood in front of her. She had not seen its approach; it was simply there before her, just as if it had taken form out of the desert air.

She recognized that it was the figure of an Egyptian

Pharaoh or a high priest—she could not tell which. It wore the short kilt-like garment and the high head-dress, with a serpent's head sticking out from the front of it (the double crown of North and South Egypt, though Margaret did not know it at the time) which had become familiar to her in the pictures of ancient Egyptian kings. She had seen many such figures in her brother's books and in the mural paintings in the tombs.

As Margaret looked with amazement—certainly not fear—at the face of the strange apparition in front of her, she thought that it was the saddest she had ever seen. In the eyes there was a world of suffering and sorrow.

She felt conscious of being awake; the moon and the stars were above her; they surrounded the luminous figure. Her brain struggled for intelligence. Was this the spirit of some great king of Egypt, or of a high priest, or what was it? Was it an optical delusion? If it was a spirit, why had it come to her?

"Tell me who you are," she said. "Do you want anything?" She spoke nervously, not expecting an answer.

"I once ruled over Egypt, and I return to see what my people are doing, if the seed I sowed has borne fruit."

"In this valley there are no people—it is a valley of the dead."

"My body was brought to my mother's tomb in this valley."

The voice was so sad that Margaret said:

"You are in trouble? You cannot rest? Is that why your spirit has returned to earth?"

"My spirit is with Aton, the master of that which is ordained. I have come to deliver a message; it is for you."

"For me?" Margaret said. "I know nothing at all about Egypt."

"That is not necessary. Aton's love is great and large. It filled the two lands of Egypt; it fills the world to-day."

"But I am ignorant. You think I understand—I don't. . . . I can do nothing."

The sad eyes in the emaciated face, the face of a saint and fanatic, smiled at her fears so tenderly that Margaret's heart was less troubled.

"You can tell the one who is to do my work, the one who knows and loves Aton, Aton—the compassionate, the all-merciful. Tell him that I bid him take up my work."

"Your work?" Margaret said. "You were a king of ancient Egypt. . . . You speak as if you had worshipped our God . . . there is no one who can do your work . . ." She paused, and then said nervously, "Egypt is different now—it cannot go back."

"Egypt must go on, not back. Nothing is different in the heart of man; your soul is as my soul. Aton liveth for ever in his children. He filleth the two lands of Egypt with his love. I was his messenger."

"But who was Aton?" Margaret said. In her mind she was striving to recall if she had ever heard any references to the worship of one god in Egypt, except by the children of Israel.

"The one who is to do my work will tell you. He has studied my teachings, he understands the love of Aton, whose rays encompass the world."

"Thank you," Margaret said. "I will tell him." She knew instinctively that it was Michael who "understood."

"He knows my work and my desire for the people of Egypt. He knows that my people worship one God, but that they have no love of God in their hearts."

As the figure moved, it became less distinct. Margaret said: "Is that all I am to tell him? Are you going away?" She felt distressed; she knew not why.

"I will return. Give him my message."

"That he is to continue your work in Egypt?"

"That he is to teach my people the love and the goodness of Aton, that his mercy is everlasting."

"Tell me, before you go, who is Aton?"

"You ask, as people asked of a Messenger of God who followed after me in my distant kingdom of Syria. Did He

not answer them: "Who are those that draw us to the Kingdom of Heaven? The fowls of the air, and all the beasts that are under the earth and upon the earth, and the fishes in the sea, these are they which draw you, and the Kingdom of Heaven is within you."

"And will he understand if I tell him your words? I am quite ignorant of your teachings."

"He will understand because he has studied my teachings. He knows how fair of form was the formless Aton, how radiant of colour. He knows that the Kingdom which is Heaven is within us. In loving the world and the beauty of the world which is Aton's he knows my commandments."

As Margaret was about to ask why he had not appeared to Michael himself, for she had no doubt that it was upon him that the mission was laid, the vision disappeared and she was left alone, under the clear skies, gazing out over the valley which lay spread before her, in its eternal stillness. She could hear the sound of her last words vibrating in the air. There was not a sign of any living thing near her; only in the distance she could hear the barking of the jackals, a desert sound to which she had already grown so accustomed as to scarcely notice it.

That she had been wide awake she was convinced; she did not feel as though she had been asleep. As she tried to visualize the vanished figure and to repeat to herself the words, which she must either have imagined or heard, Michael came out and offered her a cigarette.

"Who were you talking to?" he said. "Freddy and I thought we heard your voice."

"Michael," she said eagerly, "what time is it? Have I been asleep? Have I been here long?"

She spoke anxiously, impatiently.

"How can I tell if you have been asleep?" he said, laughingly. "As to the time, it's about eleven o'clock. Do you often talk in your sleep?"

"Sit down beside me," she said urgently, "and let me tell you what has happened. If I have been asleep, I have

dreamed it; if I was awake, I have experienced a very extraordinary thing, the most extraordinary thing you can imagine!"

Michael threw himself down on the ground at her feet.

"While I was sitting here, and, as I thought, wide awake, thinking over our walk in the Sahara and about your story and enjoying the moon and the stars, quite suddenly a figure appeared. I was awfully startled, and yet not frightened."

"What sort of a figure? One of the house-boys pretending to be a spook?"

"No, no house-boy. If I tell you, don't laugh, for even if it was only a dream—which, of course, it must have been—it was very beautiful and solemn."

Now that Margaret was talking to someone about it, the incredibility of the incident seemed much stronger. "It was probably a dream," she said humbly. "All the same, don't make fun of it."

"I won't laugh," he said. "You know I never laugh at such things. I believe in visions—if you like to call these visitations visions."

"But the odd thing is that the figure was exactly like the picture of an Egyptian Pharaoh—that's why it now seems absurd—only his face was not like the proud arrogant faces of the Egyptian kings one sees in pictures—fighting kings. It was more like the face of a suffering Christ, the saddest face I every saw, or ever will see again. Oh, those eyes!" Margaret shivered, and paused.

"Please go on," Michael said. His voice encouraged her.

"I can't remember exactly what he said . . . it's all slipping away. He spoke of some character of which I never heard; he said beautiful things—I wish I could recollect the exact words he used."

"Then he spoke to you?" Michael's voice was low, intense.

"Yes, he spoke. He gave me a message for you."

"For me?" Michael said passionately. "For me? How do you know it was for me?"

Margaret trembled as she spoke. "How do I know it was for you?" She paused. "I do know—or, at least, I never doubted while the figure was here. Now it seems foolish—it must all have been a dream."

"No, go on. I want to hear everything."

"He said I was to tell you that you were to carry on his work in the world, he said that you would understand." She paused. "If it was you, you will understand, because he said you had read his teachings and believed in them. Does that convey anything?"

"Yes, yes. Go on—what else?" Michael's voice trembled with impatience.

"There was one word he used which I have forgotten . . . and it meant everything. I wish I could remember it! It's a name I never heard before."

"Think," Michael said, "do try to think—it may come to you." Margaret noticed that he was trying to hide his excitement; he was more nervous than she was.

"He spoke of someone as God, and said beautiful things about Him . . . this God, of everlasting mercy . . . those were his word. . . . Oh, I remember the name!" she cried. "It was Aton—it seemed to be the name of his God. He spoke of Aton as St. Francis spoke of Christ. Aton was in the birds and fishes and flowers and in the cool streams."

Michael turned round and grasped Margaret's hand. He was trembling with excitement; he could hide it no longer.

"It was Akhnaton! Oh, Meg, how wonderful! Tell me everything . . . the spirit of Akhnaton!"

"But who was Akhnaton? I am in the dark. He said he was Aton's messenger."

"First tell me all you can remember."

Margaret tried to recall everything that the Pharaoh had said to her. His exact words she could not repeat, but their essence she contrived to convey quite clearly to the listening Michael.

"Akhnaton," he kept murmuring. "It must be Akhnaton . . . a message to me through you!"

One sentence she was able to repeat almost word for word. "Who are those that draw us to the Kingdom of Heaven? The fowls of the air and all the beasts that are under the earth and upon the earth, and fishes in the sea, these are they which draw you, and the Kingdom of Heaven is within you."

Michael had unconsciously drawn closer to her as she spoke. She heard him say, with a sigh of intense satisfaction, "His very teachings, Christ's own words!"

"Tell me as exactly as you can what he was like."

Margaret closed her eyes to bring back a picture of the vision, the wonderful figure, luminous and bright.

"His sadness is what I remember most plainly. I had thought that all the Pharaohs were proud, hard warrior kings, with no pity in their hearts. This king's face spoke of the suffering of Christ, of a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. His sorrow seemed to be for humanity, for our sins, not the sorrow of a man who had known only personal unhappiness."

Michael said nothing; he was too deeply moved.

"As I told you," Margaret continued, "he had a very strangely-shaped head, more curiously-shaped than I can describe—very long and sloping upwards to the back. He wore a high head-dress which seemed too heavy for his slender neck. Coming from behind it there were bright rays, just like rays of the sun—I have never seen anything like them in any picture . . . oh, it must have been a dream! It all sounds quite absurd." Margaret's trembling voice belied her words.

"Akhnaton!" Michael cried excitedly. "Now there can be no doubt. Oh, Meg!" He had unconsciously been using Freddy's pet-name for her, his hand sought hers sympathetically.

Margaret prized the word "Meg" as it came affectionately from his lips.

"Meg, it is all too wonderful!"

Michael said no more; he had buried his face in his two hands. He would have given his youth to have seen what Margaret had seen.

"Then you don't think it was a dream?"

"How could you have dreamed the very appearance of Akhnaton, or dreamed his personality, when you have never heard of him?"

"I suppose I couldn't," she said. "But was Akhnaton unlike any other Pharaoh of Egypt?"

"As unlike as St. Francis was to Nero."

A sudden idea came to Margaret. "But," she said, "he spoke to me in English, in my own language. If it was really the spirit of Akhnaton, how could he?"

"Dear Meg, there are more things in divine philosophy than are dreamed of by you or me. In what language did Our Saviour speak to St. Francis, who was an Italian, and to St. Catherine?"

"That is true," Margaret said, in a changed tone. "Will you tell me all about this Pharaoh?"

Michael thought before answering her question, and then he said, "I'd rather not, not yet."

"But why?"

"Because I don't want to put any ideas into your head. All this has come perfectly naturally, and through a modern who was totally ignorant of the message she was conveying. If you were to receive another message, if you ever were to see Akhnaton again, and you knew all about him, it would not be the same thing."

"Oh," Margaret said quickly, "I forgot—he said as he disappeared, 'I will return.'" She gave a deep-drawn sigh and said nervously, "Do you think he will?"

"Will you be afraid? Were you afraid?" Michael's arm had slipped almost around her shoulders. It was a moment when close human contact came very graciously to the girl.

"Afraid? No, he was too gentle, too sad—there was

absolutely nothing to be afraid of. I didn't stop to think of the supernaturalness of the vision—I was much too interested. If it was a ghost, I shall never be afraid of ghosts again."

Michael shivered.

Meg looked at him. She had hurt him; she felt a slight shrinking in his sympathy.

"Don't speak of ghosts, Meg—I hate the term, with all its cheapness and irreverence!"

"Then you believe in visions? You are convinced that I have not dreamed all this?"

"If it had been Freddy who had told me, I should have said that he had been asleep and dreamed it, because he knows all about Akhnaton. We are constantly discussing his character, a character I admire much more than he does. But as it was you who saw him and you who have described him as accurately as if you had his portrait in front of you, I feel certain it was not a dream."

Meg remained silent, while her thoughts worked with a new and amazing rapidity. In Egypt she felt that anything was possible; the supernatural might very soon become natural. And certainly the face which she had seen was so unlike the types of the conventional figures of the Egyptian kings she would have visualized if she had tried her best to picture one from imagination, that she began to wonder if Michael was right in his assumption that she had actually seen and been in communication with the spirit of Akhnaton.

"But why should he have chosen me, this great Pharaoh?" she said. "Modern me, with no knowledge whatsoever of his kingdom or his beliefs!"

"Ah, why?" Michael said. "Have we ever been told why Mary was chosen to be the Mother of Jesus, the Divine Man Who taught the world what Akhnaton tried to teach his people thirteen hundred years before His coming—that the Kingdom of God is within us? Who can tell the manner or the means by which God works? Not half, or a quarter, of

the Christian world knows, Meg, how often God speaks to them through mysterious channels—through spirits, if you like. When people are inspired to do good works, to lead what the material world calls holy lives, God has spoken to them, the God Who is within them, the God Who brought you and me together, Meg, to enjoy this valley. Its emptiness and stillness is full of God. Don't you feel that its beauty and solitude are due to His presence?"

Meg shivered. "I know what you mean."

"Don't be nervous. It is a great privilege, this sense of the divine, this beautiful closeness to God, this cutting off of our material selves, this knowledge of our Kingdom of Heaven within us."

"I am far more earth-tied than you, Mike. I do feel these things, but more feebly, less convincingly. I have never thought much about them. We Lamptons are very practical; all our men have led good, clean, straightforward lives, and our women have not made bad wives and mothers, but I don't think we have been idealists, or very religious. Our sense of honour more than our beliefs has kept us straight."

"Poor, poor Akhnaton!" Michael said. His thoughts had strayed while Margaret spoke.

"Why do you say 'Poor Akhnaton?' Why was he so sad?"

Michael evaded the question by saying, "We won't speak of this to anyone, if you don't mind. Let it be just between you and me."

Margaret hesitated for a moment. There was something stirring and pleasurable to her emotions in the idea of having a secret with Michael; it was like possessing a part of him all to herself; yet she shrank from keeping back anything from Freddy. Even this dream—if it was only a dream—she would naturally have told to him, because it held such a wonderful idea; it would have interested him. It was interesting from the scientific point of view, the fact that she should have been able to project her unconscious

brain into the history which she was going to study and accurately visualize and create for herself the personality and teachings of a Pharaoh of whom she had never heard. If it had been the great Rameses, or any Biblical character who in later years entered into Egyptian history, it would have meant less, for already the personality of the great builder-king of Egypt was known to her, by the frequency with which she had heard the expression "Rameses the Great." But of the heretic Pharaoh she had never heard.

"Do you mind not mentioning it even to your brother?" Mike said. "If he was not in sympathy with my belief that it was not a dream, he might unconsciously affect you—he would probably tell you much that I would rather you didn't know until we find out more."

Margaret gave her promise willingly. Michael's reason seemed to her such a justifiable one that their secret might be kept even from Freddy.

Presently Freddy shouted out, "I'm off to bed, Meg—kick Mike out and go to yours—you've had a long day."

As Mike said good-night, Margaret noticed how strained and grave he was. "Don't look so serious!" She tried to speak lightly. "To-morrow we shall both say that it was all a dream. Fancy an Egyptian Pharaoh rising out of his tomb below the hills to speak to me! I'm not going to think of it any more—I'll send myself to sleep by trying to say the Arabic alphabet backwards."

Michael did not look any the less grave. "He was brought to the valley," he said, "to his mother's tomb, and I don't suppose that I am the first person to receive a message from him—perhaps the first European, but then, I love his teachings. They have not been known very long."

"He said he had come to see what his people were doing. Do you really think he has given this message to others?"

"Why not?—in another manner. These holy men in Egypt who feel compelled to give up their lives to preaching and praying, and who travel from desert-town to desert-town, calling on the people to worship the one and only God

—who knows what the manner of their call was, or how God came to them?"

"Then you think that God came to-night, in this valley, in the form of Akhnaton, to you through me?"

"I certainly do. Akhnaton, like Christ, became divine. We could all be divine if we allowed ourselves to be."

"Good-night," Meg said, for Freddy was shouting again. "It's late, and I'm afraid I am too matter-of-fact and far too materialistic to follow your ideas and beliefs."

"I wish I followed what I believe," Mike said. "On a night like this you can't help believing that God is in the yellow sand and in the blue sky and in the beautiful stillness. He is in you and me and around us. The hills look very holy, don't they? But to-morrow it will be so easy to forget, to take everything for granted, or to behave as if chance had produced God's world." He held her hand for one moment longer than was necessary. "One is so closely in touch with the beauty of God here, Meg. In busy Luxor or Cairo, or in any city, material things are the things that matter. God is forgotten, set aside . . . man's ingenuity is so much more obvious."

"I know," Meg said. "Do you wonder at hermits and saints?" She smiled a beautiful "Good-night."

When she was alone in her room, she opened Maspero's *Dawn of Civilization*, which Freddy had placed there for her. She turned over its pages idly. "I wonder if I should find anything about Akhnaton here," she said, "or if this is too early history?"

Suddenly she closed the book. "No, I won't—I will keep my promise. I won't read anything about him."

She paused and thought for a few moments: her brain was too active for sleep, her nerves too much on edge, so instead of reading about Akhnaton, who is known in history as Amenhotep IV., the heretic Pharaoh, she knelt down and prayed to his God, beginning with the old familiar words, "Our Father, which art in heaven," for He is the same God yesterday, to-day and for ever, the God of whom

Akhnaton said, "He makes the young sheep to dance upon their hind legs, and the birds to flutter in the marshes," and as a modern writer said of Him, "The God of the simple pleasures of life, Whose symbol was the sun's disc, just as it was the symbol of Christianity. There dropped not a sigh from the lips of a babe that the intangible Aton did not hear; no lamb bleated for its mother but the remote Aton hastened to soothe it. He was the living father and mother of all that He had made. He was the Lord of Love. He was the tender nurse who creates the man-child in woman, and soothes him that he may not weep."[1]

This was the God Margaret prayed to, not knowing that it was Aton, the God whom Akhnaton first taught the world to praise, the God for whom Akhnaton thought his kingdom well lost. He was Margaret's God, as He is our God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, the God Who revealed Himself to His chosen people in the form of Jesus Christ.

One thousand three hundred years elapsed between the mission of Akhnaton and the mission of Jesus Christ. Still another one thousand and nine hundred years were to elapse before the world was to know that there was a king in Egypt, the land of the crocodile-god and the cat-god, Egypt, a very Pantheon of animal-headed gods, to whom God revealed Himself as he revealed Himself to Christ, a God of Love, a God of Tenderness and of Mercy—"The master of that which is ordained."

## CHAPTER VI

The next day Freddy announced at breakfast, which was a typically English meal—except for the excellence of the coffee—that there was to be a very extra-special ball the next night at the Cataract Hotel at Assuan.

[1] Weigall's *Akhnaton, Pharaoh of Egypt.*

"Would you like to go to it, Meg?" he asked. "I think you'd enjoy it—I can guarantee you plenty of partners."

"Would you go to it if I wasn't here?" Meg asked tentatively. The old Meg in her thrilled at the idea of dancing on a good floor with good partners. Freddy had told her of Michael's record as a dancer, so she knew that she could count on two partners, at least, for Freddy and she had learnt dancing together, and had enjoyed nothing better than waltzing with each other.

"Yes, I thought of going," Freddy said. "I can leave everything all right here, and it's about time we had a day off." He turned to Michael. "Carruthers is coming to see me. He wants to stay the night, so that's all right." Carruthers was a fellow-excavator attached to a camp at Memphis.

"Then I'd love to go," Meg said. "I haven't danced for ages, but I left my 'gay rags' at Luxor."

"I'll send Abdul for them," Freddy said, "and you can go to Assuan early to-morrow and get your traps in order. I don't want a fright, mind—the tourists dress like anything."

Meg laughed. "I'll do my best, but don't expect too much of travelled garments."

While she was speaking quite naturally and with genuine interest about the ball, a vision was forming itself before her eyes, her visitor of the night before; the dark sad eyes and the emaciated face of the heretic Pharaoh became extraordinarily clear. It usurped her mind so completely that she found it difficult to pay attention to the subject which she was discussing.

She tried to banish the influence, but failed. She had forgotten the name which Michael gave to the God whom the Pharaoh had so greatly loved. She could not even recollect the words of his message. Only his luminous form and melancholy eyes were there in the sunlight before her.

She began to wonder which vision was the more fantastic and unreal—the picture which she had visualized of the

grand ballroom in the magnificent hotel at Assuan, filled with men and women in modern evening dress, or the figure of the ancient Pharaoh, as he had come to her in this barren valley in the western desert.

"Wake up, Meg!" Freddy said. "Dreaming seems infectious."

Meg knew what her brother meant. So did Mike.

"Don't forget that the practical Lampton mind is a jolly good thing. That old drifter won't like living in a tent or a caravan, on twopence a day, when he's sixty!" Freddy lit his cigarette; he had finished breakfast. "You'll come, of course?" His eyes spoke to Mike. "Gad, what a topping morning it is!"

"Rather!" Mike said abstractedly. "Unless you want me to stay here?"

"Carruthers will be all right here alone—he knows the place as well as I do." Freddy's voice did not express much eagerness for Michael's company at the ball, and Michael knew the reason. Freddy was unable to decide in his own mind whether it was wiser to urge Mike to go and let him see Meg as Freddy knew he would see her in all her pretty finery, and let him enjoy the pleasure of her perfect dancing, or allow him to stay behind and so avoid the risk of meeting the woman whom he knew would be there. He had seen her name in the visitors' list in the *Egyptian Gazette.* She was staying at the Cataract Hotel at Assuan. He was so divided as to the wisdom of Michael's going or staying that his response had lacked his usual note of sincerity.

"Then I'll go," Michael said, for into his mind had floated a vision of Margaret dressed in her ball-finery and dancing as Freddy's sister would dance—dancing with other men.

"Then that settles it," Freddy said. "We'll go a buster to-morrow night and we'll make up for it after. You can begin real work next week, Meg—sorting and painting, if you care to."

When Freddy was ready to start off to his work, Meg

went with him. It was too early for the sun to be dangerous and the air was deliciously fresh and clean. Meg's hands were dug deep down into the pockets of her white silk jersey, just as her brother's were dug deep down into the pockets of his white flannel coat. Meg's long limbs looked almost as clean-cut as her brother's in her closely-fitting white skirt. As Michael watched them walk off together, he said to himself, "They are absurdly alike; they are like twins—they see eye to eye and think mind to mind."

As he said the words his sense of Meg contradicted his last remark, for he knew that he could say things to Meg which Freddy would not understand; he knew that if they had thought mind to mind he would not have asked her to keep the secret which they now held between them.

Thoughts full of tender affection for Freddy made him feel happily contented; to have such a friend and to be allowed to work with him was a privilege deserving of sincere thanks. For a few moments he stood lost in gratitude and praise. These dreaming moments, about which he was so often good-naturedly chaffed, were not entirely wasted; they gave him the spiritual food his nature demanded. The desert holds many prayers.

"Why so abstracted to-day, Meg?" Freddy said, as they reached the site of excavation. Margaret was no great talker at any time, but there was something new in her silence this morning and Freddy felt it.

"Am I abstracted? I didn't know it."

"A bit off colour? Are you feeling the sun? You'd better go back before it gets any hotter and rest more to-day, if we're to go to the dance to-morrow."

"Oh, I adore the sun," Meg said. "I believe in my former incarnation I worshipped it."

"A disciple of Akhnaton? I think we all are, if we only knew it. Poor Akhnaton!"

"Oh, Freddy, who was this Akhnaton? No, I forgot—

don't tell me." Her voice, for Meg, was emotional, excited. "I want to spell things out for myself."

"What do you know about him?" Freddy said. "I thought you hadn't begun reading yet? Has Mike been preaching his religion? Mike's dotty on Akhnaton—his religion's all right, but as a king he was an ass."

"No, no, Mike hasn't told me anything about him and I really would rather come to him in his proper place in history. I mustn't dip, though it's a great temptation, but it spoils serious work."

They had stopped and were looking down from the height of the desert to the level of the excavation which was furthest advanced. Things had developed greatly since Margaret's first visit. Now she was able to see that they were at work upon a vast building of some description. The enormous size and the beautiful cutting of the stones and the exquisite strength of the mortarless masonry indicated noble proportions.

"How interesting it's getting!" she said. "I love these blocks of evenly-hewn stone in the sand—they look so mysterious, and eternal."

"I want to take the men off this, if we're going to Assuan to-morrow—it's getting too hot."

"Why?"

"Because there were indications yesterday that we had struck a sort of rubbish-heap of things which had been turned out of the tomb."

"What kind of things?"

"I don't know yet . . . all sorts of things. Probably the relatives of the dead threw them out when they visited the tomb from time to time; just as we throw away faded wreaths and flowers, they threw away accumulations of broken vases and offerings."

"And you don't want the workmen to know?"

"I want to be on hand when they are cleaning it up, and it can't all be done in one day. They are quite capable of sneaking back here before the *gaphir's* about in the

morning, to see what they can pick up, to sell to the visitors in Luxor. It's a great temptation."

"I suppose they consider the tiny things they find far more theirs than ours?"

"I suppose they do, but, mind you, the Museum in Cairo gets its pick and the choice of all that's found in Egypt in the various sites of excavation."

"Oh!" Margaret said. "I didn't know that."

"Certainly it does," he said, "and rightly, too, although nothing would be saved or be in any museum if it wasn't for the various European schools. The natives would eventually plunder and steal everything, and if the excavation had all been in the hands of the Egyptian Government, heaven knows where the treasures would be to-day! As it is, Cairo has the finest Egyptian museum of antiquities in the world."

"Akhnaton was buried in this valley?"

"Yes, in later days in his mother's tomb. His first burial-place was at Tel-el-Amarna."

"How odd! That's what he told me last night," Meg said dreamily, almost unconsciously. She could hear again the sad voice of the Pharaoh, saying, "I was laid in my mother's tomb in this valley."

Freddy looked quickly up at her; he had left her to descend to the workmen's level. "So Mike has told you about him, then? I thought he would!"

Margaret blushed to the roots of her hair. "Just one or two things—nothing really very interesting."

"I knew he would, sooner or later. He's got Akhnaton on the brain."

"He really has scarcely mentioned him to me—never until last night."

"Go back, Meg," Freddy said, as he disappeared down a deep channel in the excavations. "It's getting too hot for no hat. You must be careful—you can't afford to play tricks with the sun in Egypt. It's better to worship it like Akhnaton than to trifle with it."

"All right, I'll go," Meg said, and as she went she wondered how it came to pass that Akhnaton was both a sun-worshipper and a devout believer in the Kingdom of God which is within us.

## CHAPTER VII

The ballroom at Assuan was a wonderful sight. Margaret had never been to a more brilliant dance. The dresses of the women amazed her; they were so costly and beautiful. The air of Egypt is so dry that their delicacy of texture had been uninjured by travel. The gay uniforms of the English officers, the Orders of the officials, looked their best in the vast room, whose architecture and decorations were a fine reproduction of ancient Egyptian art.

Margaret was radiantly happy; she loved beauty and the dignity of vast surroundings. In Egypt it seemed to her that everything was done on an imposing and noble scale, everything except the little mud villages of the desert, her "dear little brown homes in the East." Happiness made her appear very lovely—indeed, she was beautiful that night and many people asked who the charming girl was, who danced so well and who looked so happy.

She danced very often with Freddy, so naturally people began to say that at last Lampton had been "caught." She had danced very often, too, with Michael, and even Freddy's step had not suited her so well. With Michael there was something more than mere perfection of dancing; there was the added sympathy of mind as well as body. When his arms encircled her for the first time and Margaret felt him steering her gently but firmly through the well-filled room, such a perfect sense of rest pervaded her senses that a sudden desire to cry, just softly and happily, came to her. Happy Margaret!

Neither of them cared to speak while they were dancing;

they remained as silent as they had done when they stood together in the vast stretch of the great Sahara, but they were conscious—and happily so—of each other's enjoyment. Could two young people be so close to each other, two people so greatly in sympathy with one another, and not know something of the thought in each other's minds?

"Will you let me take you in to supper?" was all that Michael said, at the end of the last dance which they were to have together. He handed her reluctantly over to her waiting partner as he spoke.

Meg nodded her assent and smiled radiantly over her partner's shoulder as she whirled off.

Her beautiful white shoulders showed up the duskiness of her hair; her head was distinguished and arrestive. As Michael was watching her and waiting for her to come round the room again to where he was standing, so that their eyes might meet, a gentle, caressing hand was laid on his own and a voice said:

"Ah! now I know why you have not looked for me. Who is she?"

Michael started. The low, tender voice instantly thrilled every nerve in his body, while at the same moment an overwhelming desire to slip away and lose himself amongst the dancers came over him.

"She is a fine-looking creature," the voice went on, "but that type gets coarse at forty, don't you think?"

Michael swung round quickly and faced the lovely woman who had spoken to him. Her figure, in spite of its childish slimness, suggested not youthful purity but a sensuous grace. In her soft, flesh-tinted gown of chiffon, which left her arms and neck quite bare, a dress which merely suggested a veiled covering for her tiny body, she was temptingly feminine. To most men she would have been irresistible, for she was as supple and straight as a child of thirteen.

Her eyes gazed familiarly into Michael's; they were inviting and exquisitely lovely. Even Mrs. Mervill's bitterest enemies had to admit the charm of her eyes. Hard and

cruel they could be, just like the uncut amethysts which in colour they resembled—eyes of a deep, bluish purple. They had looked their cruellest a moment ago, for envy had crossed her path. Every inch of her tiny person was envious of the girl who had smiled over her partner's shoulder to Michael Amory. She was envious because she could see at a glance that Margaret was all that was fine and clean and noble in womanhood. The girl whom Michael Amory had been looking at would always get what was best in men, while she could only get what was worst.

"My partner has had to leave me," she said to Michael, for he had paid no attention to her remarks about Margaret. "He had a touch of fever; it came on quite suddenly. Will you take me out of the ball-room?"

They had moved off together, Michael unable to help himself; he could not allow her to go alone.

"If you aren't dancing, let us go and sit out on the balcony—it's too lovely to be indoors. Now, isn't it?" she said as they reached the wide covered loggia, dotted with palms and basket-chairs and small tables, which looked over the black rocks of the first cataract on the Nile, a scene which in all Egypt has no equal, for it is unique and extraordinary.

Beyond the river, with its black rocks, which showed in the water like the indefinite forms of seals or shoals of swirling porpoises, there was the bright yellow sand of the desert, which led into a world of primitive silence, while above them and all around them were the stars and the night of Egypt.

Mrs. Mervill had left the ball-room early, because she knew that the balcony would be almost empty during the first part of the evening.

"Isn't having this all to ourselves better than dancing in that crowd? This is Egypt."

"It's beautiful," Michael said, as he arranged the cushions in her chair to suit her taste, which was scarcely in keeping with the views of a dignified woman. When he had finished, Mrs. Mervill let her hand slip down his coat-

sleeve—she had laid it there as she spoke to him—until it rested on his wrist; her fingers were caressing.

"Tell me," she said, looking up into his face with a winning and soft expression, "what have you been doing with yourself since we parted? You have been much in my thoughts—never out of them, indeed."

"My usual work in the camp," Michael said. "Its interest always increases, and although it seems pretty much the same every day to ordinary people, to us it is full of variety."

"Lucky man! We poor women have no such distractions. I want to live in the desert," she said eagerly. "I want to sleep in the open under these stars."

Anyone might have made the same remark with no *arrière pensée* in their words. Mrs. Mervill could not. Her remark contained an invitation; Michael knew it.

"Can you never get away?" she asked. "It would be my expedition, if you would run it for me."

Michael moved from her side, with the pretence of drawing a chair to within speaking distance of her. She had reluctantly to let his wrist slip from her fingers.

"Say you will arrange it," she pleaded. "For weeks I have felt the call of the desert and you know you'd love to come."

"I can't do it," Michael said, almost sternly. "Please don't tempt me . . . I have work to do."

"Oh, but I will tempt you!" She laughed the soft, low laugh of passion. "By every means in my power. With you it is so difficult to know what will tempt you most. Am I to appeal to the mystic side of you, or to the human? I think the human Michael will suit me best, the Michael who longs to let himself go and enjoy the fullness of Egypt and the wonders of the desert!"

"Don't appeal to any part of me," he said quickly. "Leave me to do my work in the best possible way—try not to act as a disturbing influence."

"Then I have been a disturbing influence?" Michael's

voice had betrayed the fact that his work had not been accomplished without difficulty.

"Yes," he said, for the spirit of truth was always uppermost in Michael. "For some days after I left you the last time I found great difficulty in concentrating my mind on my work. . . . I was dissatisfied."

"Then I succeeded!" The amethyst eyes, devoid of all hardness now, caressed Michael and disturbed his nerves. The woman was very beautiful, and he was conscious that her mind was set on her desire to win him. He knew that it was not love; he knew that their intimacy was not one of wholesome friendship. He was becoming more and more awake to the fact that this wealthy woman, who looked like a child but for the expression of her eyes, had taken an unreasoning desire to have him for her lover. In a measure he could not but feel flattered, for with her beauty and wealth she could have had the attention of better men than himself. He was too generous in his judgment of women to attribute her desire to the lowest motives, the prospect of enjoying through another the innocence which she had lost herself so long ago.

"I tried to reach you, Mike. I used every effort of my will-power, or mind-power, or whatever power you like to call it. I insisted on your feeling me. I sent myself out of myself to you."

"Why did you do it?" he said. He had leaned forward and had laid his hand on the cushions of her chair, at the back of her head. His distressed voice was less harsh.

"Why did I do it? Because, dear, I want you." Her voice was low and wooing; it was one of her charms.

Michael did not answer. His senses were beginning to throb. The sound of a native earthen drum, with its sensual thud, thud, thudding, and the watery note of a key striking a glass bottle, as an accompaniment to the slow measures of bare feet on the deck of a Nile boat, added an undefinable touch of Oriental passion to the scene.

Michael tried to draw away his hand, but she caught it

and pulled his arm round her neck and held his long fingers imprisoned under her chin.

He protested. The thud, thud, thud of the *darabukkeh* below kept time with the throbbing of his pulses, while the subconscious visualizing of the body-movements of the Sudanese dancers aided and abetted the woman in her designs.

"You know, dear, you are behaving very foolishly. I must never see you again if you do this sort of thing. It can only lead to terrible unhappiness for us both."

She gently kissed his fingers, pressing her teeth against his knuckles—with all her education and fashionable clothes, a creature as primitive as any tent-dweller in the desert.

"Don't say you won't see me again. I won't be foolish, I promise. But I am very lonely, you don't know how lonely, Michael."

"Poor little woman!" he said breathlessly; he was genuinely sorry for her. If her nature craved for love and affection, it was hard for her to live as she did, without it.

"It's Egypt," she said, "Egypt and the desert. I want you all alone, Michael, in the loneliest part of the loneliest desert in the world, and I want as many kisses as there are stars in the heavens—kisses that only my love and Egypt can teach you how to give!"

"I must leave you," Michael said again, "if you will speak like that."

He got up to go. Mrs. Mervill also rose from her reclining position on her long deck-chair, and sat upright.

"I do, I do!" she said, while she held up her beautiful lips to his face. "There is no one to see, there is no one to care! I want a kiss for every star there is in the heavens."

The man could bear it no longer; all Egypt was tempting him. He bent his head and kissed her lips.

From the river below came the long cries to Allah of the Moslem boatmen and the clear music of an *'ood* or lute; the deep note of the native drums had been silenced. It had given way to the song of an Arab tenor. The music of the

*'ood*, whose seven double strings, made of lamb's gut, are played with a slip of a vulture's feather, drifted through the clear air. The tenor song was an outpouring of a lover's full heart. The passion of the night had triumphed.

At their feet lay the black rocks and the swirling waters of Egypt's Ægean and the buried city of Syene, and in the distance, yet surely affecting their senses with its tragedy and grace, was Philæ, the fairy sanctuary of the Nile. In the submerged temple of Philæ lies the bridal chamber of the beloved Osiris and his wife Isis.

None of all this was lost upon Michael, whose nature was ever turned to the concert pitch of his surroundings. Assuan affected him as a gorgeous orchestra affects a lover of Wagner. But the sound of the hotel band, bringing a waltz to a close, made Mrs. Mervill leave her lounge-chair and seat herself circumspectly on a more upright one. Michael did not sit down; he wandered about, speaking to her abruptly and unhappily at brief intervals.

She was answering one of his questions when Margaret Lampton, flushed and radiant with the excitement of dancing, came upon the scene; her partner was a little behind her. Mrs. Mervill neither saw nor heard her footsteps; Michael had both seen and heard her. Margaret, thinking that he was alone, walked quickly towards him. Suddenly she heard a hidden voice say caressingly:

"I will promise you anything you like, Michael mine, and keep it, too, if you will try to see me as often as ever you can. Remember how lonely I am, and that I shall live for your visits."

Margaret stopped. Egypt had become as cold as the Arctic. She felt lost. Her intention had been to remind Michael that it was almost supper-time. Her partner was now by her side. He knew Michael Amory and spoke to him.

Mrs. Mervill had risen from her chair and as she came forward, Margaret hated her, even while she thought that she was the fairest and most beautiful thing she had ever

seen. Michael introduced the two women to each other, excellent foils as they were in their beauty and type.

As Margaret gave one of her steadfast honest looks right into the eyes of the delicately-tinted woman in front of her, she was conscious of an appalling dislike and fear of her. She was equally conscious of the woman's antagonism to herself, although her words had been charming and friendly.

"If she wasn't beautiful and tiny, I'd like to wring her neck and throw her to the crocodiles below!"

This was what might be interpreted as Margaret's true feelings as she answered Mrs. Mervill's question and succeeded in making some banal remarks about the view and the magnificence of the hotel. When she had said all that politeness demanded of her, she turned away, a trifle disconsolately.

"Please wait one moment, Miss Lampton," Michael said. "I think this is the supper-interval. Mrs. Mervill," he said, "can I take you back to your partner? I am engaged to Miss Lampton for supper."

"No, thanks," she said, "I didn't engage myself to anyone for supper." Her eyes plainly expressed the fact that they had hitherto at these dances always enjoyed the supper-interval together. "Will you be very kind and send a waiter out here with a glass of champagne and some sandwiches? That is all I want."

Michal looked disturbed. "But I don't like leaving you alone."

"I prefer the company of the stars," she said, "to just anybody—really I do. I never feel that one comes to Egypt for these hotel dances." This was meant for Margaret, to make her feel frivolous and vulgar.

Margaret refused to accept it. "My brother and I have been dancing every dance and every extra and forgetting all about Egypt. Have you?" She turned to Mike.

"No, I have been sitting this last one out with Mrs. Mervill. She feels tired. And certainly Egypt is very much here." He pointed to the scene before them.

"Yes, quite another Egypt," Margaret said. "Egypt has so many souls."

"And I have to be a little careful," Mrs. Mervill said, "of over-fatigue."

"I am sorry," Margaret said, while she inwardly noted the woman's perfect health. The slender feminine appearance of her rival had nothing in common with ill-health; a blush-rose bud was not more softly and evenly tinted. She suggested to Margaret something good to eat—pink and white ice-creams mingled together in a crystal bowl.

Healthily devoid as Margaret was of sex-consciousness, it was curious that this first close inspection of Mrs. Mervill should have told her what she never dreamed of before, or even thought about—that she loved Michael Amory. This woman was going to come between herself and Michael; that there was great intimacy between them she felt certain, also that Michael, even though he might care for the woman, was not himself under her influence. She had never seen him look as he looked now.

The partner who had brought Margaret out on to the balcony constituted himself as Mrs. Mervill's cavalier. He was immensely struck by her beauty and was inwardly overjoyed when Michael Amory introduced him to her. He had not engaged himself for supper because there had been no one with whom he cared to spend the time, except Margaret, and she was engaged to Michael. Now that he had obtained an introduction to Mrs. Mervill, he was delighted to attend to her wants.

If Michael Amory had seen Millicent Mervill's attitude towards her companion, he might have felt—and very naturally—a certain amount of vanity. Born with little or no sense of honour or morals, she was extremely fastidious. No one could have been more selective. Ninety-nine per cent. of the men she met bored her not to tears, but to rudeness; for the hundredth she might feel an unbridled passion.

Margaret and her companion were seated at a little

supper-table in the immense dining-room of the hotel, a room which had been built after the proportions and decorated in the manner of an Egyptian temple. Their table was close to a column, which was decorated from pedestal to capital with the most familiar mythological figures of ancient Egypt. Tall lotus flowers with their green leaves decorated the lower portions of it. The whole thing certainly was an amazingly clever reproduction of one of the ancient columns of the famous hypostyle hall at Karnak. A gayer scene could hardly be imagined, for the bright colours of the ancient decorations had been faithfully copied.

Margaret had been talking rather more than was her wont to Michael, about things which neither really interested her nor were in sympathy with their mood. Their former intimate silence had given place to a banal conversation, which hurt them, one as much as the other, while they kept it up.

The nicest part of the evening, for so Meg had thought that it would be, was proving a failure, a dire and pitiful failure. The only thing to do was to accept Michael under the new conditions and get what pleasure she could out of the magnificent scene. The Egyptian servants, in their long white garments and high red tarbushes, the Nubians, in their full white drawers and bright green sashes and turbans, were moving silently about, administering as only native servants can administer to the wants of the fashionably-gowned women and brightly-uniformed men who filled the magnificent hall.

"How absurd that woman looks," Margaret said, "sitting with her back to that figure of Isis." She knew now at a glance the goddess Isis as she was most familiarly represented. "I do hope I don't look quite so grotesque!"

Michael looked at the woman, whose hair was decorated with an enormous egrette's crest, in the manner of a Red Indian's head-dress. Margaret knew quite well that she herself did not in any way look grotesque; since she had

been in Egypt she had conceived a horror of the eccentricities of Western fashions, therefore her speech was insincere.

"Of course you don't," Michael said absently. "You look just awfully nice." He felt shy and blushed as he spoke, for he knew that he had severed himself from Margaret by an unspeakable gulf, that he had now no right to say anything intimate to her. Earlier in the evening he could have said with frank enthusiasm how beautiful he thought her, if an occasion like the present had offered itself.

They were now at the ice-creams, wonderful concoctions with glowing lights inside them, and their futile conversation had dribbled out, but the silence which had fallen upon them was constrained; it had nothing in common with the old happy silence of mental sympathy, the silence of united minds.

Margaret had still two dances to give Michael, and she wondered how they were to get through them. The supper had proved heavy and dragging. It seemed scarcely possible that they were the two people who had stood, delighting in each other's companionship, on the high ridge of the Sahara desert two evenings ago; that it was this man to whom she had told her wonderful dream. She wondered if he had forgotten it.

As she thought of her dream, their eyes met. Michael's dropped quickly. With Mrs. Mervill's kisses still burning into his soul, he banished the thought of the divine King. The seed of evil which she had planted in the garden of his soul many weeks ago had been watered and nourished tonight. It had sprung forth like the green blades on the banks of the Nile after the inundation.

As Michael's eyes dropped, Margaret took her courage in both hands and said as brightly as she could, "We're not enjoying ourselves particularly, are we? We seem to have lost each other. Shall we cut our two dances and try to find ourselves again in the valley? I hate this sort of thing."

"If you wish it." Michael's voice was reproachful.

"Do be honest—you know I'm boring you. You have lots of friends here, and I can get partners."

"Things do seem to have taken a wrong turn," he said, "but it was not of my willing." Inwardly he cursed the hour he had ever come. She would never believe that it had been to see her in her evening-dress and to enjoy the rapture of dancing with her.

"We are neither of us much good at pretending," Margaret said. "But never mind—better luck next time! And we had some lovely dances in the early part of the evening."

Her words, without meaning it, implied that before she had been introduced to Mrs. Mervill, they had been happy. They had risen at Margaret's instigation from their table and were wending their way out of the supper-room. Michael was drifting towards the wide balcony, towards the fresh cool air of the river.

"No," Meg said determinedly, "not there." A vision of Mrs. Mervill, pink and fair and seductive, had risen before her, the rose-leaf creature with the hard eyes, who had so abruptly broken her sympathy with Michael.

Michael, without speaking, quickly turned the other way. He led her through the big entrance to the front door of the hotel. The view was ugly and uninteresting, like the surroundings of any huge Western public offices or government buildings. The glory of the hotel was the view from the balcony, overlooking the Nile, and its superb interior decorations.

"The old trade-route to Nubia lies back there," Michael said, indicating the desert, which lay out of sight at the back of the hotel.

"The old route to 'golden-treasured Nubia'?" Margaret said. "Fancy, so close to this fashionable hotel—who would ever dream it!"

"The caravan-route to Nubia—the Kush of the Bible—an immortal road. To me the word Nubia is full of suggestion."

There was something so distant in the tone of Michael's voice as he spoke, that Margaret found little pleasure in hearing what he had to tell her. How delightful he could have been upon such a subject as the old trade-route to Nubia she knew only too well, so well that she was not going to let herself be hurt by his aloof way of mentioning it.

"Egypt to-night," she said, "for me means a big ball and gay dresses. I have lost the other sense of Egypt." She turned up her eyes to the heavens. "Except for the heavens," she said, "I really might have been at the Carlton Hotel in London, at an Egyptian fête held there, or something of the kind."

"As you said, Egypt has so many souls, but its heavens have only one. The best starlight night at home is a poor, poor affair compared to this."

Before he had finished speaking Freddy appeared and claimed Margaret for a dance. She left Michael almost gladly, yet hating the feeling that they were still as far apart as they had been when they sat down to supper.

What a strange night it had been! The one half pure joy and the other certainly not happiness.

Alone in the open space in front of the hotel, Michael stood and cursed his own weakness. Why had he stooped to those lips? Why had he allowed himself to be unworthy of his intimacy with Margaret? He was sorry for Mrs. Mervill, for he believed her stories about her husband's drunkenness and degrading habits, as he almost believed that she had for some strange reason fallen in love with himself. He wished with all his might that women were nicer to one another, so that one of them, a woman like Margaret, for instance, might have given this lonely, lovely creature the affection and intimate friendship she craved for. Women shunned her and so she had to resort to men for the companionship and also for the affection she needed.

Michael understood very well the pleasures of sympathetic friendships; he was conscious that to himself human

sympathy meant a very great deal, and so he felt sincerely sorry for the woman who was denied it. He liked the quiet places of the untrodden world; cities had no charm for him. But he needed human sympathy in his solitude to make his enjoyment complete. He felt sorely annoyed with the fates which made it impossible for him to give Mrs. Mervill all that she asked of him and at the same time continue on the footing on which he had been with Margaret.

And how was it that he could not? How was it that Margaret had instantly divined that there was more than an ordinary or desirable intimacy between Mrs. Mervill and himself? How was it that he had felt dishonoured and ashamed?

He had to return to the ball-room to find his partner for the next dance. As he did so, he passed Mrs. Mervill, who was coming out of it. She looked at him with laughing eyes, a soft, beautiful creature, of supple movements, whose perfect lips had told him the promises which she was capable of fulfilling. If he had not known Margaret, what would he have done?

But Margaret held him. He knew that she was worth a thousand Mrs. Mervills, in spite of the latter's more vivid beauty and her quick wit. For Mrs. Mervill was clever and could be extremely witty and amusing when she liked. Her daring tongue stopped at very little, but it had the gift of suggestion, which always saved her stories or repartees from indelicacy or vulgarity.

Margaret, who had offered him nothing but friendship, stood out in his mind as one of the women with whom it was a privilege for any man to be on intimate terms. In his thoughts of her, Margaret was high and strong and pure. When his mind dwelt on her, it soared; when it dwelt on Mrs. Mervill, it grovelled. He did not wish to grovel: it was not in his nature to do so; it took a woman such as Mrs. Mervill to bring his lower self to the surface. He hated himself for even unconsciously condemning her

and he tried always to remember her charming moods, the hours they had spent together when they first met on the gay pleasure-boats on the Nile. Those were the days when the clever woman hid from the man whom she had selected her baser nature. During those guarded days she had been gay and amusing and apparently as innocent as a schoolgirl. It was only after a considerable number of meetings and many exchanges of thought had passed between them, that she began to show her hand, or dared to convey to him in a hundred insinuating ways and expressions the real nature of her feelings for him. Very grudgingly and very reluctantly Michael had to admit to himself that she had fallen in his estimation, that he would not be sorry if they were never to meet again. Yet he was not strong enough to cut himself off from her; her appeal to his pity stood in his way.

He had never met any woman before in the least like her. Her fearless audacity had at first, just at first, somewhat amused, as it amazed him. He had scarcely credited its being genuine. As she owed nothing to her husband, or so she said, she saw no reason why she should not live the life of a wealthy bachelor, who enjoyed it to the full. What was sauce for the gander was sauce for the goose.

To gain any hold on Michael's affections, she had recognized that she must go carefully. It was her rôle to let him think that her passion for him was a totally new thing in her life, that she had at last found the man who could help her to be the woman she longed to be. With her knowledge of mankind, she knew how to awaken and keep alive in Michael the only element in his character upon which she could work, the very element he strove to banish and subdue.

Later on in the evening she sought him out, because she had discovered that Margaret Lampton was living in her brother's camp and that she was in daily companionship with Michael. Freddy had told her this to anger her. He

was proud of his sister's beauty and pleased that Mrs. Mervill had seen her admired.

"Michael," Mrs. Mervill said, "that dark girl is in love with you. She hates me."

"Don't talk nonsense!" Michael said. "Why will you spoil our interesting conversation by reverting to a forbidden topic?"

They had been talking intellectually and seriously for quite half an hour. Mrs. Mervill was a great reader, and she had determined to place herself in a position to talk intelligently, if not learnedly, to Michael about things Egyptian. She had been reading what Ebers had to say about the tragedy of Isis and Osiris being the foundation of many latter-day Egyptian romances. It had even found its way into *The Thousand and One Nights.*

Mrs. Mervill was much more word-fluent than Margaret. Often her imagery was charming.

"Because it fills my heart, Michael. It is the background of everything. I saw the birth of hatred in her eyes—she has never hated before."

"I don't think she knows what hate means," he said, "and I wish you would leave her alone."

"I have not spoken about her before."

"You said she would be fat and coarse at forty."

Millicent Mervill caught his hands in hers. "You dear silly boy, so she will, both fat and complacent, but then I shall be thin and shrewish and shrivelled."

Michael laughed. "You are a tease!" he said good-naturedly.

" 'The Rogue in Porcelain' used to be my name at school. But tell me—how long is that dark-haired girl going to stay with her brother?"

"I don't know," Michael said. "If she doesn't feel the heat, perhaps until he returns to England and the camp breaks up."

Mrs. Mervill clenched her pretty teeth. "And you ex-

pect me to be good and quiet and submissive and stay here?"

"I want you to be reasonable."

"That's out of the question—I very seldom am, and I am not going to be to please Miss Lampton, I can tell you!"

"Then what are you going to do?" He could not be hard on the woman for loving him; he wished he could help her and induce her to be reasonable. If she had been free, he would have felt himself bound to marry her.

"I will arrange something," she said. "I don't know what."

"What sort of thing?" he said. "Nothing foolish! Do look at things dispassionately."

"I won't!" she said. Her face was upraised to the stars. "I won't give you up to that dark-haired girl."

He swung round and spoke roughly. "Don't you know I can't be yours, and you can't be mine?"

"And you want me not to be a dog in the manger, while you enjoy the next best thing that comes along!"

"I never said so. Your mind jumps at conclusions. I hate such ideas and conversation. I wish you would stop it."

"I will be worse than a dog in the manger," she said, "if you make love to that girl in the desert."

"Hush!" Michael cried. His grasp of her wrist hurt her. "Hush! You will make me hate you."

"No, you won't, Michael," she said, "because you have kissed me. Words were made to hide our feelings, kisses to reveal them." She suddenly paused and looked as sad and innocent as a corrected child. "I would be a saint, if you would let yourself love me, Michael."

"What would be the good?" he said. "You belong to some one else."

"A nice sort of belonging!" she said, disconsolately. "He doesn't care a scrap what becomes of me."

"Can't you possibly divorce him?" Michael did not mean that he would marry her if she did; his mind was groping for some solution of the problem.

Millicent Mervill remained silent. "I could let him divorce me," she said at last.

"Don't!" Michael said intuitively. His voice amused the woman.

"I don't mean to," she said. "Why should any woman be divorced because she lives the same life as her husband does when he is apart from her?"

"You don't, and aren't going to," Michael said earnestly.

"I would, Michael, with you—only with you."

"I wish you could have been friends with Miss Lampton instead of hating her," he said sadly.

"Pouf!" Millicent Mervill cried. "Thanks for your Miss Lampton—I can do without her friendship! I prefer hating her."

"You are so perverse and foolish and . . ." Michael paused " . . . and difficult."

"No, loving, you mean, loving, Michael—that's all I'm difficult about."

## CHAPTER VIII

THEY were back in the valley again and splendid work was going on at the camp. Another two weeks' hard digging had done wonders, and Margaret and Michael had found each other again.

In the dawn, two mornings after the dance, when the mysterious figures, heralding the light, were abandoning themselves to their God on the desert sands, Mike had seen Margaret standing at her hut-door, watching, as he himself so often watched, for the glory which was of Aton to flood the desert with light. Meg's eyes the day before had told Michael that she was unhappy; he knew now that she had not slept.

While the white figures were still bent earthwards and

the little streak of light was scarcely more than visible, Michael went to her and asked her forgiveness.

"Forgive me," he said. "I need forgiveness."

Meg took his hand. "I hate not being friends. Thank you."

"It made me miserable," he said.

"Then let's forget. I was stupid. This is all too big and great for such smallness." She indicated the coming of the unearthly light.

"Thy dawning, O Aton," Michael said.

Margaret smiled. "He was very far from us at Assuan."

"He was there. I stifled my consciousness of him, Meg."

"Don't," she said. "Let's go forward."

"I know what you mean," he said. "Regrets are weak, foolish."

"I don't want to bring the hotel at Assuan into this valley. Let's just watch the sun transform its infinite mystery into our waking, working, everyday world—if Egypt can be an every-day world."

"May I say Akhnaton's beautiful hymn to you? It is about the sunrise. He must often have seen it just as we are seeing it now."

"Akhnaton's? Yes, do. How wonderful to think that he wrote hymns!"

Michael began the famous hymn. " 'The world is in darkness, like the dead. Every lion cometh forth from his den; all serpents sting. Darkness reigns.' "

"We might substitute jackals," Margaret said gently.

" 'When thou risest in the horizon . . . the darkness is banished. Then in all the world they do their work.

" 'All trees and plants flourish, the birds flutter in their marshes, all sheep dance upon their feet.' "

"Oh," Margaret said delightedly, "how like it is to the hundred and fourth Psalm! Do you remember how David said: 'The trees of the Lord are full of sap. . . . Where the birds make their nests. . . . The high hills are a re-

fuge for the wild goats'? I think that's how it goes. I love that Psalm."

"Yes," Michael said, "verse for verse, the idea is absolutely similar and the similes are strikingly alike. The next verse is just as much alike. Listen. . . . I am so glad you like it."

"First look," Margaret said, "at that light. Yes, now go on—I love hearing it."

" 'The ships sail up stream and down stream alike. The fish in the river leap up before Thee and Thy rays are in the midst of the great sea. How manifold are Thy works. Thou didst create the earth according to Thy desire, men, all cattle, all that are upon the earth.' "

"How extraordinarily like!" Margaret said. "How do you account for it? I suppose it is still allowed that David wrote the Psalms? Did he live before Akhnaton or after him?" She laughed softly. "Don't scorn my ignorance. You see, I have kept my promise—I have read nothing at all on the subject."

"Akhnaton, you mean? Oh, before David, by about three hundred years. There are all sorts of theories on the subject. The commonest is that Akhnaton, having come of Syrian stock, on his mother's side, may have got his inspiration from some Syrian hymn, as David also may have done. I reject that theory. The whole of Akhnaton's beliefs and teachings prove the extraordinary originality of his ideas. He borrowed nothing; God was his inspiration."

"You are going to tell me about him, about his work?"

"Yes, soon, some day. Have you thought about him since?" Michael referred to the God of Whom Akhnaton was the manifestation, the interpreter. He always spoke of Akhnaton as a divine messenger.

His voice betrayed a sense of regret, of unworthiness. Yet in his heart he knew that, weak as he had been, he had not sinned against the spirit of Akhnaton, that he realized even more fully his watchword, "Living in Truth." Akhnaton's love for every created being because of their

creator filled Michael's heart even more fully than it had done before. He had learned his own moral weakness, his own forgetfulness. Blame and criticism of even the natives' shortcomings seemed to him reserved for someone more worthy than himself. They had simply not yet seen the Light; their evolution was more tardy; they were less fortunate. Some day all men would be "Living in Truth." Akhnaton's dream would be realized. How impossible it is for our material selves to do without the help which is outside ourselves, that help which is our divine consciousness, Michael had learned over and over again. His lapses had not affected his beliefs. They were only parts of the struggle, the oldest struggle known to mankind, the struggle between Light and Darkness. Just as the Egyptians from the earliest days believed in the triumph of Osiris over Set, he knew that no thinking man could doubt the eventual triumph of all those who fight for the spiritual man.

"Yes, I have thought about him," Margaret said. "And, last night I dreamed about him—my . . . " she paused ". . . my wonderful visitor."

"What did you dream?" Michael said. "Do tell me."

The light was breaking over the valley—not the sun's light, but the cold light of dawn. The "heat of Aton" was still withheld.

A blush which was invisible to Michael tinged Meg's clear skin. Her dream had been beautiful, vivid. It had illuminated her world again.

"It was nothing very coherent. I saw no vision, as I did before." Her words were spoken guardedly. "It was the lesson the dream revealed."

"I should like to know, Meg."

"A voice seemed to wake me. It spoke to me of you. I was to help you . . . you were struggling."

"You can help me," Mike said. "You have."

"It spoke of the oldest of all stories, the battle of light against darkness. It said that Egypt in the early days

worshipped light; in the days which followed light was swallowed up in the worship of false gods."

"Osiris and Set—you know the legend—the fundamental ethics of all religions."

"I know a little about it," Margaret said. She paused.

"Please go on . . . tell me everything."

"In dreams we are so vain, so wonderful . . . you know how it always is! The ego in us has unlimited sway. In my dream I dreamed that my friendship was to be 'light'; if I withdrew it, you would have darkness. What glorious vanity!"

"Oh, Meg, it's quite true! Will you give me back your sympathy? I . . ." he hesitated, " . . . I am trying to be more worthy of it."

"We are friends," she said. "I was foolish and conceited, my dream made me see how foolish. I had no right to . . ."

He interrupted her. "Yes, you had . . . you weren't foolish. Your sensibilities told you what was absolutely true. . . . I would explain more if I could."

"No, don't explain—things are explained. I thought I should find you here; I wanted to begin the new day happily. My dream made me see so very clearly that the world is made up of those who sit in darkness and those who sit in light, that thoughts are things. My thoughts were unjust, unkind, so my world was unkind, unjust. I made it."

"The light which is Aton," Michael said.

"If we wish to enjoy happiness, we must sit in the light. We must make our own happiness."

"In the fullness and glory of Aton."

"God, I suppose you mean," Margaret said.

"The one and only God Whom every human being has striven to worship in his or her odd way ever since the world began. There is God in every man's heart. It doesn't a bit matter what His symbol may be. Some races of mankind have evolved higher forms of worship, some lower;

their symbols are appropriate. But they are all striving for the one and same thing—to render worship to the Divine Creator, to sit in the Light of Aton."

"But the sun," Margaret said—she pointed to the fiery ball on the horizon—"I thought your divine Akhnaton was a sun-worshipper?"

"He worshipped our God, the Creator of all things of heaven or earth, even of our precious human sympathy, Meg, for nothing that is could be without Him, and to Akhnaton His symbol was the sun. The earlier Egyptians worshipped Ra, the great sun-god; Akhnaton brought divinity into his worship. He worshipped Aton as the Lord and Giver of Life, the Bestower of Mercy, the Father of the Fatherless. All His attributes were symbolized in the sun. Its rising and setting signified Darkness and Light; its power as the creative force in nature, Resurrection. It evolved mankind from the lower life and implanted the spirit of divinity in him through the Creator of all things created. The sun was God created, His symbol, His manifestation."

"Look," Margaret said, "look at it now—it is God, walking in the desert."

. . . . .

For a little time they stood together, their material forms side by side.

. . . . .

Michael's house-boy, with a deferential salaam, suddenly informed him that his bath had been waiting for him and was now cold.

Before Michael hurried off Margaret said, "Thank you for my first lesson in Akhnaton's worship." She held out her hands.

"We all worship as he did, all day long," he said, "when we admire the sun and the stars and the flowers, when we admire all that is beautiful, we are seeing God."

"I adore beauty," Margaret said, "but I forget that

beauty is God. You, like Akhnaton, are conscious of God first, the beauty He has made afterwards. If there had been the text 'God is Beauty' as there is 'God is Love,' it might have helped us to understand."

"I forget him," Michael said, "you know how easily."

"It is far better to know and love, even if you are human and forget . . ." she paused " . . . than always to sit in darkness, to sit outside the door."

"I don't see how any one can," Michael said. "It is all so exquisitely evident. The desolation must be so terrifying, like living in this lonely spot with no watch-dogs to keep off evil-doers. It takes great courage to live on one's own strength, one's own material self."

They had parted, Margaret going to her room, Michael to his tent. Freddy, who was almost dressed, saw two figures approaching, wrapped up in big coats.

"That's a good job!" he said. "The sunrise has made them friends again." He was out in the desert the next moment, hearing the roll-call of the workmen, who had all ranged themselves up in a line near the hut.

## CHAPTER IX

One evening, some weeks later, when the trio, Margaret, Freddy and Michael, were busily engaged in sorting and cleaning the day's finds, which had been more than usually interesting, Margaret held up for inspection a tiny alabaster kohl-pot, which she had freed from the incrustations of thousands of years. It was exactly similar to a little green glass bottle which she had bought in the bazaar at Assuan, in which the modern Egyptian, but more especially the Coptic, women carry the kohl which they use for blacking their eyes and eyebrows. Margaret showed Freddy the bottle, which led to a discussion about the similarity of the customs of the modern Egyptians and those in the pic-

tures in the tombs, whose decorations always reveal the more human and intimate side of the life of ancient Egypt than the decoration of the temples.

"They were as vain and fond of making up as any woman of to-day," Freddy said. "We find no end of recipes for cosmetics and hair-dyes and restorers. One popular pomade was made of the hoofs of a donkey, a dog's pad and some date-kernels, all boiled together in oil. It was supposed to stop the hair from falling out and restore its brilliancy. There is another, even more savoury, for hair-dyeing."

"Do you suppose they still use that recipe?" Michael said.

"I shouldn't wonder. Customs never die in Egypt—they have had the same superstitions and the same customs for thousands of years. The Copts have clung more jealously to them, of course. The Moslem invasion did a little to change some of them, but not many."

Margaret listened while Freddy explained how the Moslems, after the Arab invasion, behaved with regard to the festivals and superstitions of the pagans very much in the same way as the Early Christian church in Rome behaved with regard to the pagan festivities and superstitions—adapting them, as far as was possible, to the new religion, grafting on such things as the people would not or could not renounce. The wisdom of the custom was obvious. The new converts, who believed in one God Whose Prophet had come to knock down all graven images in the temples, were still allowed the protection and comfort of their personal amulets, which were powerful enough to protect them from every evil imaginable, or to bring them all the blessings their simple souls desired. Arab workmen, who believe that Allah wills all things, that whatsoever happens, it is his purpose, will flock round any soothsayer who professes to see into the future and do the most absurd things conceivable to keep off the evil eye. The eye of Horus is still their favorite amulet.

"Abdul professes to tell fortunes and see into the future.

They do sometimes manage to hit off some wonderfully clever guesses," Freddy said. "Abdul has been curiously correct in a number of things he has foretold relating to this bit of work."

"What did he tell you about this excavation?"

"He didn't tell me—I overheard the workmen's chatter. He has worked them up to a pitch of absurd excitement."

"What sort of things has he foretold? Good or bad? What things have come true?"

"I forget the small points now. I really can't tell you. He predicts all sorts of extravagant things about the inside of the tomb, says he has seen visions of a wonderful figure of a queen, dressed as if for her bridal, and the place all glittering with gold and precious stones—the most superb tomb that has ever been opened."

"Oh!" Meg said excitedly. "I wonder if it will be?—if there will be any truth in it?"

"Tommy-rot!" Freddy said. "But the excitement's spread—the men are working like mad—never did so much good work before."

"May I talk to Abdul? I'd love to have my future told!"

"I'd rather you didn't—at least, I would rather the other workmen didn't know he had spoken to you. I don't like them to imagine that we believe in such things."

"Very well," Meg said. "I see what you mean."

"You are never wise to let the natives lose their respect for your disdain of spooks and superstitions. I never scoff at their fears and beliefs in every sort of imaginable supernatural power, but I like them to think that my religion places me above such terrors. We pray to our Christian God to protect us according to His will; they say five prayers to Allah daily, the one and only God, and at the same time at every hour of the day they perform countless acts and ceremonies to propitiate malign spirits and powers. They are a curious people—the best of them are very de-

vout, but some of the most devout are not the best by any means."

"Do you mind if Michael sees the fortune-teller? It would be so interesting."

"He knows Abdul." Freddy looked at Mike. "It's different to letting one of our womenkind meddle in such things."

"Did the ancients believe in dreams?" Margaret said. Michael's eyes had spoken; he had seen the man.

"Don't you remember Joseph's dream?"

"Oh, of course!" Margaret said. "But Joseph seems a modern in this valley."

"The ancients looked upon dreams as 'revelations' from a world quite as real as that which we see about us when we are awake. They were sent by the gods and, according to the texts in the tombs, much desired."

Margaret's and Michael's eyes met. Her dream which had brought them together again had undoubtedly been sent by God.

There was an industrious silence for a little time, then Margaret asked, "Have you ever come across any traces of Akhnaton's religion in the tombs in this valley?"

An amused smile hovered round Freddy's mouth. It was obvious that Margaret had caught something of Mike's enthusiasm for the heretic Pharaoh.

"No, nothing of his religion," he said. "It is too far from his scene of action; his influence was almost local—it was a personal influence and died at his death. He was a man born before his time; the world was not ready for his doctrines—they were far above the people's heads."

"How do we know?" Mike said eagerly. "Surely God knows best when to send His messengers, when to reveal Himself?"

"Anyhow," Freddy said, "you know that when he died his teachings died too. The people who had professed his beliefs returned to their old gods. The one and only trace of Akhnaton's influence here is in his mother's tomb, where

every sign of Aton worship has been chopped off the wall, every trace of his symbols obliterated. Akhnaton had no doubt introduced them into his mother's tomb; she had shared his beliefs, which had not, of course, become extreme at the time of her death."

"Truth never dies," Mike said. "His beautiful city was abandoned, his temples neglected and overthrown, his people again became the victims of the money-making, political priesthood of Amon-Ra. But who can say that the spirit of Akhnaton is dead to-day? Who can tell that the seed of his mission bore no fruit? Thought never dies."

"As you like. Anyhow, even before he was buried—embalming was a lengthy process—his religion as a state religion, as anything at all of any influence, or as a power in the land, was doomed."

"You don't admire him as Mike does," Margaret said. "He seems to have been almost as perfect as a human being could be—the first living being to realize the divinity of God."

"As a religious *dévoué*, he was, as you say, almost a saint. He spent his life throwing pearls before swine—you might as well try to make a charity-school class see the beauty of Virgil in the original—and letting his kingdom go to rack and ruin."

"Oh," Margaret said, "you didn't tell me that." Her eyes searched Mike's. "Did he let Egypt go to pieces?"

"He was anti-war, as I am," Mike said, "as all lovers of God and of mankind ought to be. He was perhaps foolish in his belief that if the world could be converted to the great religion of Aton, which meant perfect love for everything that God had created and absolute reverence for everything because he created it, then there would be no wars. If God is love and we believe in God, how can we kill each other? Akhnaton's idea of the duty of a king was the improvement of mankind. He tried to give men a new understanding of life and of God. The moral welfare of

the human race was more to him than the aggrandizement of its emperors."

"I've no patience with all that," Freddy said. "He inherited a magnificent kingdom; he let it dwindle almost to ruin. If you could read some of the letters of Horemheb, the commander-in-chief of his army, begging him to send reinforcements to Syria, imploring him to realize the danger that menaced Asia, you would feel as impatient as I do with his mission work at Tel-el-Amarna, his cult of flowers and his new-fangled art."

"A man can't go against his own conscience. He didn't approve of war. It's an interesting fact that the only one of the old gods he recognized was Maît—he built a fine new temple to the goddess of truth at Tel-el-Amarna. He carried his enthusiasm too far," Mike said, "I grant that, but from his point of view these things were of little account. If he could have turned the heart of Egypt from the worship of false gods, if he could have imparted unto the minds of men the wonder and the love of God, all else, he thought, would follow after."

"A fanatic!" Freddy said.

"So were all saints."

"'For what shall it profit a man,'" Meg said, "'if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'" Her voice was significant. "In his day, Christ was as great a fanatic, if you like to look at things from that point of view. Fancy fasting forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, calling upon men to leave their work and follow him, preaching against the rich! How you would have scoffed at him!"

"If Akhnaton hadn't been a king, if he had merely been a prophet and a teacher, he'd have been all right. But just you listen, Meg," Freddy said, "while I read you what a modern writer says about him, and he is an intense admirer of the character of Akhnaton. This is how he describes what the messengers must have felt when they hurried back to Egypt to the new capital of the fanatical king at Tel-el-Amarna, bearing entreaties from the commander-

in-chief of the army in Syria to send reinforcements to help to deliver his distant kingdom from the oppression of her enemies." Freddy found the book and opened it. "Here it is—listen to this: 'The messengers have arrived at the City of the Horizon,' as Akhnaton called his new capital, 'their hearts are full of the agony of Syria. From the beleaguered cities which they had so lately left, there came to them the bitter cry for succour, and it was not possible to drown that cry in words of peace, nor in the jangle of the septrum or the warbling of pipes. Who, thought the waiting messengers, could resist that piteous call? The city weeps and her tears are flowing. Who could sit idle in the City of the Horizon, when the proud empire, won with the blood of the noblest soldiers of the great Thothmes, was breaking up before their eyes? What mattered all the philosophers in the world, and all the gods in heaven, when Egypt's great dominions were being wrested from her? The splendid Lebanon, the white kingdoms of the sea, Askalon and Ashdod, Tyre and Sidon, Simgra and Byblos, the hills of Jerusalem, Kadesh and the great Orontes, the fair Jordan, Turip, Aleppo and distant Euphrates . . . what counted a creed against these? God, the Truth? The only god was He of the Battles, who had led Egypt into Syria; the only truth the doctrine of the sword, which had held her there for so many years.'"

Freddy turned over the leaves of the book which he had been reading from, and began again quoting from Weigall's *Life of Akhnaton.*

"'Love! One stands amazed at the reckless idealism, the beautiful folly of this Pharaoh who, in an age of turbulence, preached a religion of peace to seething Syria. Three thousand years later mankind is still blindly striving after these same ideals in vain.'"

"How pathetic!" Margaret said. "And yet . . ." she hesitated, ". . . . the God of Battles . . . Akhnaton's was the God of Love, the God of everlasting Mercy."

"What right had Egypt ever to go into Syria?" Mike

said. "It sounds fine and one can grow enthusiastic over these beautiful old names and visualize a million greatnesses that Akhnaton was resigning, but what right had Egypt in Syria? The right of might, the right of the stronger against the weaker—Prussia's might against Poland, Spain's might against Flanders, any large country's might against a weaker, the right of armies, the right of the greed of monarchs! Akhnaton believed in God, and to his thinking war could not go hand-in-hand with a love for all that God had created."

"Get out, Mike!" Freddy said. "You'll get on to Ireland next—I know him, Meg!"

"I agree with him in a way," Meg said. "To give people the love of God and the proper sense of beauty, the enjoyment of all that God has made for their good, in the best way, which was surely the way of Akhnaton, seems better than spending the kingdom's wealth and brains in maintaining armies to kill human beings and invade new territories."

"The great question," Freddy said, "is nationality. If you don't care who wipes you out, or to what country or king you belong, well and good, live the idealized life. Someone will think quite differently and gobble you up. If Akhnaton hadn't died, there would soon have been no Egypt, no Egyptian peoples."

"They'd have been quite as happy," Mike said, "for in those days the kings actually owned their empires, they were their own property to do what they liked with. The people fought for their King, not for their country. An absolute monarch was an absolute monarch, the kingdom was his to do as he liked with."

"How was it saved? Was it ever as great again?" Meg asked.

"It was saved by his son dying almost directly after he did and Horemheb, the great commander-in-chief, at last got his way. He persuaded the reigning Pharaoh, who had married Akhnaton's daughter, to himself lead an ex-

pedition and go into Asia. After that Pharaoh's death, and the death of the next one, Ay, Akhnaton's father-in-law, who reigned for a short time—and who, to do him justice, tried to remain faithful to Akhnaton's ideal Aton worship—the great warrior and commander-in-chief, Horemheb, was raised to the throne. He brought Egypt back to its old conditions. Do you care to hear what Weigall says about him?—how completely he wiped out the 'idealism of the dreamer'?" Freddy found the passage he wanted. "'The neglected shrines of the old gods once more echoed with the chants of the priests through the whole land of Egypt . . . he fashioned a hundred images. . . . He established for them daily offerings every day. All the vessels of their temples were wrought of silver and gold. He equipped them with priests and with ritual priests, and with the choicest of the army. He transferred to them lands and cattle, supplied with all necessary equipment. By these gifts to the neglected gods, Horemheb was striving to bring Egypt back to its natural condition and with a strong hand he was guiding the country from chaos to order, from fantastic Utopia to the solid Egypt of the past. He was, in fact, the preacher of sanity, the chief apostle of the Normal.'"

"It was in his reign," Michael said, "that Akhnaton's fair city of Tel-el-Amarna was utterly abandoned; his beautiful decorations, which were intended to illustrate to the people the beauty of God in Nature, were ruthlessly destroyed. His body, which had been laid in the far-away cliffs behind his city, was removed and placed in his mother Queen Thi's tomb in this valley."

"What a tragic life!" Margaret said. She was thinking of the sad face as she had seen it in her vision. Did any one understand him? Freddy evidently understood Horemheb, the apostle of the Normal, who scorned the fantastic Utopia of Akhnaton, much better.

"He was very much beloved and probably as much understood by a few as most pioneers have been. It was in

his father-in-law's tomb that his beautiful hymn was discovered, for he was one of his devoted followers in Akhnaton's lifetime."

Margaret smiled. "The beautiful hymn you said to me that morning at dawn, Mike?"

"The same," Michael said. "I have often thought of it in connection with St. Francis' Canticle to the Sun."

"It is difficult," Margaret said, "to know how far wars and empire-building, and everything that makes for worldly-ambition and encourages the vanity of monarchs, are compatible with the true meaning of the words 'God is Love,' with the true conception of Christ's doctrines."

"Which were Akhnaton's," Michael said. "He did all in his power to raise the morals of his people. He was the first king to recognize the higher rights of women, to insist on the reverence of womanhood. He brought his queen forward on every public occasion, and that had never been heard of before. He tried to introduce a new ideal of home-life. He was a model father and husband. He thought of nothing but the moral welfare of his people and of their happiness. He was willing to lose his kingdom for the saving of their souls."

"And yet he was a bad king?" Margaret said.

"He had none of the qualities of a ruler or an empire-builder," Freddy said.

"Damn empire-building!" Mike said. "If people would only stick to their own natural territory and not go straying into other people's!"

"I wonder what you'd do if Germany strayed into ours? Sit down and let them walk over you?"

"I'd do what you'd do," Mike said, with a flash of Irish anger in his eyes—"kill every damned one of them!"

"There you are!" Freddy said hotly.

"No, I am not," Michael said, "for, as I said, what we've got, let us keep—England's possessions no more belong to Germany than my soul does. But some of our wars—well!" he laughed. "Empires are built up in rum ways, ways I

don't agree with, but we won't do any good by handing them over now to feed the vanity of the Kaiser. But the Egyptians had enough land in Africa to expand in, there was no need for their warrioring in strange lands."

"Let's chuck the subject," Freddy said good-naturedly, "and stick to work. I want to get these boxes cleared out to-night and we never do good work while we argue."

"I can't help smiling," Margaret said. "It's really too funny to think that we've got quite cross and snappy over the character of a man who lived more than three thousand years ago."

"Oh, we often do that," Michael said. "You should have heard about a dozen of us quarreling some time ago over hair-splitting theories on a much less human subject, one belonging to pre-dynastic times!"

"I wish Aunt Anna could see us, Freddy, sitting in this funny hut in this lonely desert valley, cleaning little objects and broken fragments of things that were buried three thousand years ago and fighting over a mummy, as she would say!"

Margaret had been working busily, so her tin cigarette-box, which had been quite full early in the evening with all sorts of small blue beads and tiny bits of pottery, was almost empty. She had been able to enjoy and follow all her brother's remarks about Akhnaton, as Michael had told her a great deal about him. In the three weeks which had passed since their visit to Assuan there had been no return of the vision, so she had insisted upon Michael telling her all that he could about Akhnaton. She felt anxious to understand something about the king whose personality interested and influenced him so greatly.

Michael had by no means banished the vision from his thoughts. He was convinced that Margaret had been privileged to see a vision of Akhnaton—indeed, the more he dwelt on his message, the more he felt sure that it was the beginning of a new phase in his life.

Over and over again he had repeated to himself the message: "Tell him to carry on my work."

Was he doing any work at the present time to help forward mankind? He was enjoying himself in a delightful way and to a certain extent he was assisting Freddy; but such assistance as he gave could easily be given by another; he was not essential.

There was only one man whom he had a longing to consult and that was Michael Ireton. Since his marriage with Hadassah Lekejian, a Syrian girl of great beauty and strength of character, Michael Ireton had given his time and brains and money to the founding of settlements in various parts of Egypt for the raising of the moral status of women in Egypt. He was a practical man of the world, with a charming personality. His wife was one of the most cultivated and fascinating women Michael had ever met.

If he confided to Freddy his growing desire to do the work which he felt was the work he was called upon to do, Freddy would look upon it as a fresh example of his drifting character.

The subject of Akhnaton had been dropped and perfect good humour was restored again. Michael's thoughts had soared into what Freddy called his "Kingdom of Idle Dreams." Freddy's thoughts were very practical, although they related to the history of a lost civilization and to the unearthing of objects which the sands of the desert had concealed for thousands of years. He and the workers knew that the next few days would be days of intense excitement.

So far Freddy's surmises had been correct. The chaff and scoffing which he had so good-naturedly put up with from the fellow-excavators who had been to visit the camp were likely to be turned the other way. He had little or no doubt left that he had struck an important tomb, probably the tomb of the Pharaoh for whom he was looking.

In a few days the big shaft which led to the mouth of the tomb would be cleared. Tons upon tons of debris had

been thrown out of it; the work had been stupendous. The two hundred native workers and the other more experienced diggers had worked unremittingly. Freddy was living in a high state of nervous tension. The news had spread far and wide that "Mistrr Lampton" had discovered a new tomb and one which presumably had never been entered. Freddy knew that this news would spread, would be carried on the wings of the morning in a manner which no European can ever discover. Means of transmitting news is one of the secrets which no native in Africa, North or South, has ever divulged to an European. There are hundreds of theories on the subject. Do pigeons act as carriers? Some people suggest this theory. Or is it by some wireless method which has been known to all primitive races and only lately discovered by scientific scholars of the West?

So far no one has fathomed the mystery. But Freddy knew that the news would be sent far and wide, and that every seeker after "antikas" would be prowling round the opened site. Directly the tomb was opened, it would be the Mecca of every tomb-plunderer. He had sent word for a guard of police to be ready to come when he summoned them.

When the tomb was opened he would have to prevent anyone from going into it until a photographer had arrived from Cairo to photograph it and until after the Supervisor-General of the Monuments of Upper Egypt had arrived on the spot and inspected it.

He could feel the excitement of the natives, who have absolutely no sense of honour where "antikas" are concerned. It has proved almost an impossible work to convince them that the excavators and the scholars who are engaged in the work of archæology in Egypt, or the wealthy man who has paid for the expenses of a camp, are not one and all "out on the make." They are convinced that these eager, enthusiastic scholars are just the same as they are, interested in it from a pecuniary point of view.

The curios and wonders which they dig out of the bowels of the earth put gold into their pockets.

Freddy's *Ras*, or native overseer, was a highly intelligent man, who had a genuine appreciation for antiques—he was a clever hand at faking them and did a good business with tourists—but at heart even he doubted the sincerity and singleminded purpose of the British School of Archæology in Egypt, and "Mistrr Lampton's" absolute clean-handedness in the business.

Freddy had never left the camp for more than half an hour since the excavation had become "hot." It was a strenuous time.

Naturally Margaret's thoughts were centered and engrossed in her brother's work. She could scarcely hold her soul in patience while the deep shaft was being cleared, a long and tiresome job. But at last they could count the time by days before the entrance to the tomb would be reached.

The little store-room in the hut was packed full of boxes which held the small finds. Margaret's work for some days past had been to piece together (Freddy had taught her how) the tiny fragments of a smashed vase which her brother had found. The pieces were all there, for it had been discovered in a little hollow in the sand. The conventional decoration was of an unique type; and on it was traced a branch of a plant which seemed to Freddy to resemble with extraordinary exactness a branch of the Indian fig, the prickly pear, so familiar to all travelers in Southern Italy. As the Indian fig was not introduced into Egypt until the Middle Ages, or so it had generally been supposed, for it was not indigenous, Freddy was anxious to find out if the decoration on the vase was going to prove that after all it was known to the Egyptians long before it was brought over from America. He also held that there was something in the theory which has of late become current that camels may have been known and used in Egypt from very early times, that their absence in all pictorial art

in temples and tombs may be owing to the fact that the Egyptians divided animals into two classes, the clean and the unclean; that neither into temples nor into tombs could the unclean be introduced in any form of art whatsoever.

These were the sort of discussions with which Margaret had already grown familiar. She felt that in piecing together and sketching as accurately as possible the cactus-like branch of the little plant engraved on the broken vase, she was actually helping to forge a link in one of the minute chains of Egyptian archæology.

Her brother's memory amazed her and his intelligence stimulated her. He had been such a boy at home. Egypt had converted him into a strong serious scholar. His fair head, bent over his work, with the lamplight shining on it, was so dear to her that impulsively she put her long strong fingers on the glittering hair; she longed to kiss it.

"Dear old boy!" she said. "Isn't it all just too exciting? Isn't life thrilling? Isn't it lovely to be alive?"

Freddy did not look up. "Some girls," he said, "mightn't think this being very much alive—the sorting out of bits of broken rubbish, thrown out of a tomb which has been forgotten for two or three thousand years. Did you ever think you'd care to know whether a prickly pear was indigenous to Egypt or was not? Or whether canopic jars had their origin in family grocers' jars being lent by the head of the house to hold the intestines of some dear-departed?"

Meg laughed. "It is all too odd, but being in it, and actually knowing that we are going to see into that tomb in a few days and discover who the king was who was buried there, and all about his personal and family affairs, and be able to touch the jewels he was buried with, it's too interesting for words, I think!"

"I hope you won't be disappointed. It may have been robbed."

"But you don't think so?"

"No, I don't—not at present. There was a tomb opened

at one of the camps not long ago, which told a tragic story of the end of robbery and plunder. The roof had fallen in while the burglar was busy unwrapping the cloths from the dead mummy. He was evidently trying to get at the heart-scarab, I suppose, and at the jewels which the windings held in their place. He had been smothered, taken in the act. Probably he had left his fellow-plunderers at the entrance; the roof may have looked unsafe, but he had hoped to collect all the jewels and scarabs before it gave way. Fate played him a nasty trick. The roof caved in, and we have secured all the jewels he had collected together and have learned a lesson of what must have often happened. The mummy's body was, of course, still perfect. Of the intruder only bones were visible and some fragments of his clothes. Things keep for ever in these hermetically-sealed Egyptian tombs, where neither rust nor moth ever entered in, but where thieves did break through and steal."

"How thrilling!" Margaret said. "How did you guess that the skeleton was the skeleton of a robber? I suppose as he never returned, his friends just went off and left him?"

"By the scattered jewels and the way the mummy was lying. Why should a skeleton be inside a royal tomb? Why should the mummy be out of its coffin and partly unrobed? We have actually found before now plans which the sextons and the guardians of the tombs had made for themselves of all the tombs in the cemetery which was in their care. They knew how they could be entered one from another. Of course, this valley is different. The tombs are isolated and carefully hidden. It was never a public cemetery."

"Was Akhnaton's tomb intact? Had it been robbed?"

Freddy laughed. "Back again to the tabooed subject?"

Meg laughed too. "We shan't fight this time, I promise."

"His city and palace and tomb were utterly desolated,

but his mummy had been taken away from his own tomb, before it was desolated, and brought to his mother's."

"Oh, you told me—I forgot." Into Meg's mind came again the words spoken by the sad voice. "My earthly body was brought to my mother's tomb in this valley."

When the night's work was completed, Meg voted that they should sit for a few minutes in front of the hut and try to get the "mummy-shell" and the microbes of Pharaonic diseases out of their nostrils. Freddy had never allowed them to sleep right out in the open, much as they had wished it. It was not safe, even with the dogs and his trustworthy house-boys. He would not hear of it; and he was wise.

Gladly he agreed to refreshing their lungs with the beautiful night air. Indeed, they were all three so happy together and there was so much to talk about and discuss, that bed seemed a bore. Physically tired as they were, owing to the nervous excitement in the atmosphere of their day's surroundings, sleep seemed very far off.

"Just half an hour, Freddy," Margaret said, as she threw herself down on a long lounge chair, and clasping her hands behind her head, gazed up to the heavens. "How glorious it is!" she said. "I'm so happy."

They all three lighted cigarettes and smoked in silence. Freddy was as happy as Meg; Mike was restless.

At the end of the half-hour Meg got up and said, "Who'd exchange this for a city? Freddy, you ought to get to bed—you're dead tired, really."

He rose reluctantly. "I suppose I must." His thoughts were on the morrow's work. If the tomb was going to be a really big thing, it meant a lot more to him than Meg understood. He was very young; he had not as yet struck any remarkable find; he had his reputation to make. His theories had caused much comment.

"I could never live in a city again," he said. "This life has made it impossible. And the odd thing is that it has made cities seem to me the loneliest, most desolate places in

the world. I never feel in touch with anyone. Even the other night at the ball, jolly as it was, I never once talked to anyone about anything that really interested me. I never felt that anyone would understand a single thing about all that is my real life. I suppose everyone feels the same—that their real selves are lost in crowds."

Michael and Margaret looked at each other. They had experienced the feeling; they had lost each other. In the valley they had come back to the things of Truth.

"You know I always abhorred town-life," Mike said, "and all its artificiality and rottenness and needless accumulation of unnecessary things."

"Brains congregate in cities, all the same," Freddy said, "if you can only strike them. We'd get too one-sided here, too lost in the past. It's never wise to let your hobbies and work exclude all other interests."

"I begin to think there is no past," Meg said. "Time lost itself in Egypt. Three thousand years mean nothing. The people who lived and ruled before Moses was born are more alive and real to-day for us than the events of yesterday's evening paper. I think I have learned just a tiny bit of what infinity means."

"Or rather, you have learned that you haven't," Mike said. "By the time you have discovered that three thousand years are just yesterday, you have grasped the truth of the fact that no mortal mind can conceive the meaning of the word infinity."

"Have you ever seen a ghost in Egypt, Freddy?" Margaret said, irrelevantly.

"No, never," he said.

"Did the ancients believe in them?"

Freddy was locking up the hut. "We never come across any writing or pictures to show us that they did, so I don't think it's likely. They have told us most things about themselves and about what they saw and feared."

"I wonder?" Margaret said meditatively. "I wonder if they did or didn't?"

"Of course they believed," Michael said, "that the soul of a man, the *anima*, at the death of the body, flew to the gods. It came back at intervals to comfort the mummy."

"That's nothing to do with what we call ghosts," Freddy said, "and no one but the mummy is supposed to have been visited by it. It took the form of a bird with human hands and head; it was called the *ba*."

"Oh, my friendly *ba!*" Meg said. "I have just been reading all about it—in Maspero's book you see pictures of it sitting on the chest of the mummy."

"That's it," Freddy said. "You're getting on. But as for real ghosts, there's no record of them—not that I know of. Good-night," he said, "I'm off."

"Good-night," Meg said, "and the best of luck to to-morrow's dig."

For a moment Michael and Meg stood together. "I know what is in your heart," she said. "I begin to think that Egypt is making practical me quite psychic."

"I feel I ought to be up and doing. I believe there is work I can do—I believe it is the work I can do best."

"You only can judge," Meg said.

"I have always maintained that a man should devote himself to the work he can do best, no matter how unpractical or how unremunerative it may seem to others. He must be himself, he must work from the inside."

"You are doing good work here."

"Not my work—another's."

"I can't advise. I know you must judge."

"It means leaving this valley if I do it."

"Oh," Meg said, "not yet? Not until the tomb is opened, anyhow?"

"No," he said, "I'll wait for that. I want to see Ireton—I'm going to see him to-morrow when I go to Luxor for Freddy."

"Are you going?" she said. "I didn't know."

"Yes," he said. "He wants a lot done and he can't leave the dig."

"No, he can't." Meg paused; in her heart a fear had suddenly leapt up. The soft, delicately-tinted woman on the balcony at Assuan stood out before her as plainly as the luminous figure of Akhnaton had done. She was at Luxor! Two letters had arrived from Luxor for Mike in a woman's handwriting.

"I will see Michael Ireton," he repeated. "His work is magnificent; so is his wife's. His work is amongst the men."

"In their settlements, you mean?"

"Yes, amongsts the Copts, most particularly."

"It will be sad to break up our trio," she said. "We are so happy." She held out her hand. "Good-night. I was to help, not retard—I must remember my dream."

"Good-night." Mike grasped her hand. "You are part of the light. Keep close to me when I am in Luxor to-morrow."

## CHAPTER X

MICHAEL not only had to go to Luxor on business for Freddy, but to Cairo also. He had gone willingly, because he knew that someone had to go, and it gave him immense gratification to be able to help his friend in this time of intense anxiety.

It was absolutely essential that as little time as possible should elapse between the opening of the tomb and the arrival of the photographer and the Chief Inspector. Things which have remained intact for thousands of years in the even, dry temperature of an Egyptian tomb, crumble and fade away like the fabric of our dreams when they are exposed to the open air.

It might be that there would be nothing inside it worth all the trouble and the arrangements which had to be made; on the other hand, the Arab seer's vision might be verified. So far no trace of burglars, either ancient or modern, had

been discovered. Not infrequently the finding of an Arab copper coin, or some disk made of modern metal, an amulet similar to those worn by the ancients, but made of a composition unknown to them, will indicate to an excavator that the tomb has been visited, and probably violated, by modern thieves.

Everything when speaking of time in Egypt is comparative. These intruders may have dropped the metal talisman or coin centuries and centuries ago, soon after the Arab invasion.

Michael had done all his business and was well content to spend the remainder of his day in mediæval Cairo. He shunned the European quarter, with its expensive hotels and hybrid Western civilization. He preferred the narrow dark streets of the poor natives. In the East poverty has at least its picturesque side; in the East, as in Italy, Our Lady of Poverty has her shrines, not her hovels. In London, he asked himself, could Browning have sung "God's in His heaven—All's right with the world!"?

In London so much is wrong with the world that the true meaning of Christ's words, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven," seems obvious. To Michael Amory the world was beautiful; its systems of laws and customs were all wrong. The misunderstanding of countless human beings, one with another, through their lack of Love, through their obliviousness of God, made a whirlpool of his reasoning powers.

Mike had talked matters over with Michael Ireton, who had allowed him to unburden his full heart. His ideas and plans were quite unformed. All that he was now certain of was the fact that he would never settle down to any profession or career which would mean only the furthering of his own worldy interests.

"The clear voice prevents me," he said. "And the fact is, I don't care a rap about my future position—it can look after itself. I want to work as you are working, even if I

prove a failure. I want to get something of this off my chest." He laughed. "It's all so difficult to express, and so easy to see, isn't it? Of course, I know that one man can't set the wrong in the world right, but each man can do what his right self advises. Our right self is never wrong."

"Hadassah helped me," Michael Ireton said, "and life has been worth twice what it was before. I agree with you —we must lead our own lives according to our own ideals, not according to the world's."

"Most people think me a fool," Michael said, "simply a rotter and drifter, just because I can't settle down to work at a career of my own, while the world's burden is booming in my ear."

"Think things well over," Hadassah said. "Don't rush into plans which may prove a dissappointment. Let your ideas materialize. You are never really idle—you will be sending thought-waves out into the world; they will bear fruit. Thought never dies; for good or for evil, it is everlasting."

"But I have been thinking—or drifting, as Lampton says, just idly drifting, for what seems to me like ages."

"Drifting closer to the Light," Hadassah said. "It has all been in order, it has all been a part of the Guiding Power."

"Do you think so? I wish I knew. Lampton thinks I've no ambition. I have, of a sort, but it's not of a money-making kind; it's not going to make my name or what you would call a career. I want to teach people how to live, and I don't know how to do it myself."

"I understand," Ireton said. "There's something out here, in the simplicity of desert life and the East generally, that lessens our wants. The fruits of hard labour are not so necessary as in England; the flesh-pots of Egypt are in the sunshine. If you have just enough to get along with, here in the East, and have cultivated tastes, life can be wonderfully beautiful. Poverty need never mean degradation—in fact, it has its advantages."

"That's it!" Michael Amory said. "I want to let people know how wonderfully beautiful life can be, even without wealth and worldy power, and why it is beautiful. I want them to realize the essence of things, to let those poor, crowded, degraded wretches in London know the sweetness of work in God's open spaces. I feel that I must do my little bit in helping things forward. I want to let in a few chinks of light. . . ."

Hadassah, oddly enough, finished his quotation from "Pippa Passes": "You want to give them eyes to see that

> "'The year's at the Spring,
> And day's at the morn;
> Morning's at seven;
> The hillside's dew-pearled:
> The lark's on the wing;
> The snail's on the thorn;
> God's in His heaven—
> All's right with the world!'"

Michael Ireton suggested that he should go off for a time into the desert and find himself. "There's nothing else so helpful," he said. "I've tried it." Hadassah's eyes met her husband's. She understood; she remembered.

And so Michael Amory left them strengthened and helped, not so much by their advice as by their understanding. Hadassah had charmed him, as she charmed everyone who met her. Her happiness as the wife of the Englishman who had scorned the gossiping tongues of Cairo by marrying her, and her pride in the young Nicholas, their son, who was just learning to walk, made Michael Amory a little envious. Michael Ireton's home and life seemed almost too ideal. This wealthy, happy couple lived in the world and yet not for the world; they had discovered the true meaning of life.

Michael's thoughts were brimful of Hadassah and her husband, her beauty and the romance of their marriage, the details of which were familiar to him, as he pushed his way through the labyrinth of native streets in mediæval Cairo.

After the silence of the desert, the noise was terrific—the shouts of the water-carriers, the yells of the native drivers of the swaying cabs, as they dashed at a reckless pace through the struggling and idling crowds. It was the most crowded hour of the day; the native town was wide awake. Camels laden with immense burdens of sugar-canes brushed the foot passengers almost off the narrow sideway; small boys, with large black eyes and small white *takiyehs*, darted in and out with brass trays piled high with little enamelled glass bowls.

Michael longed to close his ears with his fingers, but had he attempted to do so, a donkey, carrying terracotta water-jars of an ancient and unpractical shape, or a portly, high-stomached Turk would assuredly have robbed him of his balance.

He drifted on in a semi-conscious state of all that was going on around him, hating the noise, but enjoying every now and then the feast of colour which some group of strangely-mixed races presented. More than once, in the midst of all this noise and clamour, he saw a devout Moslem alone with his God. Before all the world, he was praying in absolute solitude. His mind had created perfect silence.

And so Michael drifted on. Only his subconscious self was leading him to his destination. He was going to a court of peace, to a strange friend who had taught him much simple philosophy and beauty, an African whose acquaintance he had made two years before, when he was in Gondokoro. Michael had saved the African's life by giving him some pecuniary assistance and carrying him on his own camel to the nearest village. He had come across him while he was on his journey—which he performed on foot—from the heart of Africa to the university of el-Azhar in Cairo.

Since his youth, this old man had saved up money for the journey. It had been the ambition and the desire of his life to study in the great university of el-Azhar, the most important Moslem university in the world. His money had all been stolen from him, when Michael's servant found

him. When he told his master of the condition the poor creature was in, a state of semi-starvation, Michael had taken him to the nearest village and there paid for a doctor to attend to him, and had supplied him with sufficient money to greatly mitigate the fatigue and suffering of his long pilgrimage to Cairo.

The journey had, of course, not been of such a hopeless character as might be supposed, for in every Moslem village there is a rest-house with free food for poor travellers; but even so, Michael knew that the distances between the desert villages are often enormous, and that they only supplied the food for the period of rest which the pilgrim needed.

Eight months later, when Michael was in England, he heard through the *'Ulama* of the *riwak* in el-Azhar to which he belonged by nationality, that the old man had arrived and that he was now living the life of a mystic and a recluse. In a beautiful imagery of words, he had begged the *'Ulama* to send his gratitude and thanks to the Englishman by whom, God, in His everlasting mercy, had sent him relief.

On Michael's return to Egypt the next year, almost the first thing which he had done on reaching Cairo was to go to el-Azhar and inquire at the ancient abode of peace if he could see his old friend. He had been admitted and exceptional courtesy had been extended to him. He was an unbeliever and a despised Christian, yet it had been through his act of charity that one of Allah's children had been nursed back to life and enabled to give his last years to the study of the Koran. He had been allowed to visit the old man from time to time.

To-day, as he walked through the noisy streets and smelt the obnoxious smells coming from an infinite variety of Oriental foods and customs, he longed to be back in the quiet valley, to feel the golden sand once more under his feet, to see Margaret's eyes smile their welcome. If he had caught the midday train, he would have been far away from Cairo by now. Yet something had led him to the heart of Islam, to that strange and unworldly seat of

ancient learning. The very meaning of the word Islam suggests the atmosphere of the place—resignation, self-surrender.

When at last he arrived at the gates and was admitted into the splendour of the spacious court, his heart was lifted up. Its ancient dignity, its divine sense of calm and, above all, the sonorous sounds of the Moslems chanting their *suras* of the Koran, intoxicated his senses. As St. Augustine was intoxicated with God, so Michael was intoxicated with the spirit of Islam.

He knew that at certain times—during Moslem festivals, for instance—fanaticism often ran so high in this, the greatest of all Moslem centres, that it would be dangerous for a Christian to set foot inside the courtyard gate. It made him glow with pleasure that he, by his little act of love—or charity, as it is less pleasantly termed—was permitted to enter the courtyard at almost any time. This, of course, he would not do; the *'Ulama* had given him permission, but he would not take advantage of his gracious offer.

To this richly-endowed university students come from all parts of the world, merely to study the interpretations of problematical passages in the Koran—poor students from India and China, wealthy citizens from Tunis, delicate-featured Malays from the Straits Settlements and negroes from Central Africa.

In the courts of el-Azhar these children of Allah become brothers; their united flag is the green banner of Islam; their nationality is Islam. This, Michael felt, was what religion ought to do for mankind. He tiptoed softly along, winding his way through the devout groups of students, until he reached a deep colonnade, supported by antique columns of great beauty, columns which had probably come from ancient Coptic churches, from Christian churches built in Old Cairo long before Islam was preached in Egypt. The colonnade was dark and almost cool after the open court, where the sun was blazing down upon the groups of picturesque worshippers and students, who seemed to be

totally oblivious of its heat. Some elderly men were merely meditating. It was a wonderful sight, gracious and solemn and mysterious. The concentration of many worshippers on God was so strong that they seemed to see Him with their eyes; it was written on their faces; they looked as if they actually belonged to God.

Filled with the religious spell of the place, Michael wound his way through the different class-rooms into which the colonnade was divided, class-rooms which so little resembled the class-rooms of his own school or Oxford, that unless he had known what was going on, it would not have dawned on him that the various professors and teachers were delivering their lectures and instructing their scholars. The divisions of the class-rooms were merely an unwritten law; there was no boundary line. Here and there groups of students, seated on the floor of the immense colonnade, which was supported on the inner side by columns of superb proportions, were waiting for their masters. Here and there a professor had already arrived; he was standing close to a column with his pupils grouped round him, just as the village-children surrounded their native teacher in a desert school.

Out of the eleven thousand pupils who attend the university every year not one of them would receive any instruction which would enable him to earn his living, or take his place in the struggle for wealth and power in the ordinary world of mankind. Devotion to Islam, and a desire to enter into a fuller understanding of God through the teachings of the Koran, alone brought them together from far and near.

Michael knew his way and presently he found himself in the residential quarter of the university and outside a partition which divided the small bare room of the man he had come to see from that of his fellow-students. The room or cell was empty, except for one praying-mat and a shelf, which was close to the floor. On it was a copy of the Koran and some religious books bound in paper. In the wall of

this narrow living-room there was an opening which led into another cell; a tall man would have had to bend almost double to pass under it. The small recess served as a bedroom.

Michael gently pulled a bell, whose chain hung against the iron grating which fronted the humble abode. As it sounded, an emaciated figure appeared under the arched aperture and a sonorous voice cried out in Arabic, "Peace be with you."

Michael, who knew that this Moslem greeting is reserved for all true believers, for members of the Islamic brotherhood, that it is rarely, if ever, offered to Christians, thought that the old man had not seen him, that his gracious salutation was for one of his own faith. He did not venture to return it in the prescribed Moslem fashion, "On you be peace and the mercy of God and His Blessing." He merely waited for a few moments, until the bent figure stood upright, and the dark eyes in the thin face met his own.

"It is you, O my son. I have long looked for you."

Michael's heart warmed with happiness. Then the Moslem greeting had been for him. He felt that peace was with him.

"I seek your counsel, O my father."

"May Allah counsel me and bring you prosperity." A lean arm, a mere bone covered with a sun-tanned skin, reached for a key which was hanging from a nail in the wall. Without speaking, he unlocked the gate. Michael noticed the fleshlessness of the fingers and wrist.

"Enter, my son, if it so please you to honour my humble abode."

Michael entered and waited in silence, until the old African had slowly and carefully locked the door again.

"To you, O my son, my dwelling-place seems empty and bare; to me it is filled with the treasures of paradise, the sweet fragrance of white jasmine."

"I understand," Michael said.

"My son," the old man said, "it is because you under-

stand that I am here, in this little room, glorified by the presence of Allah, made beautiful by His exceeding great beauty. I see many flowers; I can hear the singing of birds and the running of cool waters."

"Your home is an abode of peace. Its beauty is the perfection of understanding. Your jasmine is the fragrance of love."

"Our thoughts, my son, are our real riches. In no place are we far from Allah. What of your work—has it prospered?" This was, Michael knew, the usual Moslem greeting to a friend; it did not refer to any particular form of work or to his worldy affairs.

"All is well, O my father."

"I have no bodily refreshment to offer you, my son." He smiled a queer, grim smile; it stretched the hard skin of his face, which mid-African suns had tanned.

"I need no material food, O my father," Michael said, "I have eaten well and I know your frugal life. I seek better food."

"That is well, my son. Prayer is better than food. I have prayed for you."

Michael knew that at el-Azhar all studies are absolutely free; the teaching is entirely gratuitious. The poor students even receive their food from the rich endowments of the various *riwaks* to which they belong. This Michael had learned when he saved the old man's life at Gondokoro. He had discovered the fact that when once he was inside the gate of this gracious institution, he would be sheltered and fed and taught by the love of Islam. Wealthy students pay for privileges and more luxurious quarters. This visionary and pilgrim asked for nothing more than food enough to keep him alive. What he desired of life was the time and means for studying the teachings of the Koran and the receiving of instruction from learned professors in the refinements of theology and in the sacred traditions. His life had been spent in a treadmill of hard labour. In mid-Africa his duty had been, for as long as he could

remember, the guiding of a camel in its unceasing round of a primitive native well, the drawing up and emptying of buckets.

His smile was so mystical and ecstatic while he offered his apologies to Michael for the lack of hospitality, that Michael knew that he was visualizing and enjoying far greater luxury and affluence than had ever been the lot of the richest Mameluke of old days.

They were seated on the floor of the outer cell.

"You have been much in my thoughts, O my son. Allah has desired it. I have seen strange happenings for you. I know that the Light has come nearer."

Michael bowed his head and murmured a few words inaudibly.

"The Lord of the Worlds has revealed himself to you, O my son. My unworthy prayer has been answered." He paused. "Why have you not come? Since the Great Weeping (the inundation of the Nile) you have not left the valley?—you have not come?"

"Yes," Michael said. "I have left the valley. But only work could bring me to Cairo. I was busy."

"I have much to tell you, my son, much that Allah has shown me."

"Please instruct me, O father. I came to you for counsel, in my heart there is unrest."

"I have seen you," he went on, regardless of Michael's almost inaudible remarks, "I have seen you travelling on a long journey. I have seen many trials and many temptations for you. I have also seen you in the great Light. For you there is a treasure laid up, not only in heaven, but on earth, which will help you in the work which the clear voice counsels."

"This is strange," Michael said. "O my father, I am already greatly disturbed; I come to you for help."

"Do not fear, my son. God responds to and supplies the demands of human nature. He has willed that you should devote your life to his teachings."

"You forget, my father. I am not of your faith. I have not embraced Islam."

"I have my message to deliver. I have seen what I have seen. Every religion which gives a true knowledge of God and directs in the most excellent way of His worship, is Islam."

"You have seen me giving my life to all that I feel to be most urgent in the life of all who know the truth?"

"I have seen you, by Allah's aid and by His bountiful mercy, accomplishing work which will bestow great blessing and peace upon your soul."

"I have thought much of all this," Michael said, "since we last met. The idea has never left me, yet I am puzzled. Why should I feel like this, when better men do not?"

"God, in His almighty word, has declared a higher aim of man's existence, O my son."

"Then why do I not better understand? I feel nothing but dissatisfaction, unfruitfulness."

"A man may not always understand. A hundred different motives may hold him back. But the truth remains, my son, that the grand aim of man's life consists in knowing and worshipping God and living for His sake."

"I wish I could decide! Some people see the road so plainly before them. Mine is broken, and often it is totally lost in the desert sands."

"A man has no choice, my son, in fixing the aim of his life."

"That is your faith, my father."

"Man does not enter the world or leave it as he desires. He is a creature, and the Creator Who has brought him into existence has assigned an object for his existence."

There was silence for a little time, while the old man meditated and recited a *sura* from the Koran.

"Already, my son, even though you do not know it, you are in the faith. You have seen the perfect Light. Remember that no one can fight with God, or frustrate His designs. Not once, but many times, I have seen you, my son,

travelling on this journey. God has sent many prophets to lead mankind into the knowledge of truth. Moses and Christ, they had their divine tasks, but the last and the best of the messengers of God was Mohammed, praised be His holy name. Some day, O my son, He will perfect your religion, and complete His favours by making Islam your faith. Before these messengers there were others, for God has never left the world in desolation. I have seen you surrounded by Light, a light which comes from one of God's messengers, who is never far from you. As I see him, always in the midst of a great light, like the light of the sun, he resembles no mortal I have ever seen on this earth, or any king I have been shown in my dreams. He has greatly suffered for mankind, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, as was the Prophet Christ."

Michael was greatly disturbed. The old man's eyes were far from him. His words had their meaning for Michael more than for himself. The great sunlight was the rays of Aton. The treasure of which he had spoken—was it the treasure of which the vision in the valley had spoken to Margaret?

"Some day I may have more counsel to offer you, my son. To-day I have but strange visions, strange messages. This treasure you are to seek lies in the desert; it is a treasure of great value. I see much gold, but also, my son, much tribulation. This gold . . . it has been lost to the world . . . for many centuries. . . ."

"It is all very strange, my father. Your words are full of meaning. In Egypt there was a King, before the days of Moses, who sacrificed his kingdom to give his people God. His was the religion of the true God and His everlasting mercy."

The old man recited another *sura* from the Koran. "Go and pray, my son, open your heart to prayer, for prayer is better than strife; prayer is greater than miracles. Perseverance in prayer is Islam."

"Can you tell me nothing more?" Michael said. "Is it

not folly to start out on a journey which has no definite ending, no practical purpose?"

"I cannot tell you more, my son, nor can I tell you why these visions have been revealed to me. All I know is that I cannot doubt their source."

"Do you, my father, then absolutely believe in visions?" Michael said. "I am only a seeker after truth. I am convinced of so little."

"My son, believe in visions. Is their meaning not written on the leaf of a water-melon?" (A thing well-known.)

"We read of them in the Bible."

"Did I not ell you that I knew of your coming? It was revealed to me in a vision. I saw you groping and losing your way. I saw you in thick darkness. I saw you struggling for the Light. Is all that not true? Have you never lost the Light? Has your path been straight and easy? Has the flesh not tempted you?"

Michael bent his head

"For many weeks a friend has been very close to you. She is in the way of truth. Hold fast to her. There are others who I see in darkness."

"Yes," Michael said. "That is all true. You have seen clearly."

"You will leave those you care for most, my son, and go on a journey into a new country across the river. It is all His purpose; it is all a part of the Guiding Hand, the Ruling Power."

Michael remained lost in thought. That the old African loved him as a son he had no doubt. He knew that his ardent desire was that he should be the means of converting him to the true faith. He knew that the little help which he had once been able to give him had won his undying gratitude. This strange creature, who had only entered upon his university career after his hair had become white and his body worn to a shadow, had earned Michael's respect and veneration. He was conscious of the fact that, devout Moslem as the recluse was, he did not look upon all

Christians as heretics and unclean. Long ago Michael and he had exchanged thoughts on their conceptions of God. The pious Moslem had come to the conclusion that but for his lack of a proper understanding of the Koran and of the Prophet's relation to God, Michael was at heart a Mohammedan. He worshipped the one and only God Whom the Prophet had come to reveal. Michael believed in Christ just as he himself believed in Him, as one of God's Messengers, as one of God's Methods of manifesting Himself to mankind.

He had no hesitation in speaking to Michael or in reciting passages from the Holy Book in his presence. Daily he prayed that he might embrace the faith of Islam. It was his love for him and his gratitude which made him eager for this happiness to be bestowed upon his benefactor.

For a long time Michael remained with his old friend, who was glad to learn from him many things which could never have reached his ears from any other source. He lived as a hermit and a recluse inside his little cell, which was lost in the vast dimensions of the Mosque of el-Azhar. As he was lost to the world, so was he surrounded by things of the spirit.

It was late in the afternoon when at last Michael said good-bye and the aged student locked himself into his cell. His adieu was lengthy and beautiful and expressed in the true Moslem fashion. This ardent Englishman was as dear to him as a son. He had no sons of his own, or indeed any friends who loved him. There was scarcely a soul in his old home who remembered his existence. The man who had guided the camel at the well had ceased to cause even his late master a passing thought. The native teacher who had instructed him in the Koran in his boyhood, along with the other village children, and who had first inspired him with the desire to study the Sacred Book at el-Azhar, had long since gone to that world where "black faces shall turn white and white faces shall turn black."

As Michael retraced his steps circumspectly through the

class-rooms of the university and across the open court, where the afternoon sun almost blinded him—the darkness of the old man's cell made it seem even fiercer than it had been in the morning—his mind was filled with a thousand thoughts. He was much more restless than he had been on his arrival. Had he done wisely in paying this visit to the visionary? Was he only adding unrest and bewilderment to his soul?

The old man's last words had been to counsel him to follow the dictates of his own conscience, which was God.

"On this journey, which will lead you into the Light, a child of God will guide you, a child of God will point out the way." These had been his last words.

Michael knew that with Moslems the expression "a child of God" is generally applied to religious fanatics, and to simples, people who have not practical sense to enable them to enter into the struggle for existence, people who have, as the Western world terms it, "a screw loose."

"A child of God will lead you. To him has been revealed this ancient treasure, which the desert sands have guarded for unnumbered years."

Michael wondered if he was mad or dreaming. To believe a single word of the mystic's advice seemed rank folly; but here again he was brought face to face with a fact stranger than fiction. This African had spoken of a King who had been God's messenger before the days of Moses and Christ. He was totally without learning, except in the Koran; he was ignorant of the existence or personality of the great heretic Pharaoh; of Egyptian history he knew nothing. Yet what he had said and visualized fitted in with Michael's theory and belief that Akhnaton had buried a great hoard of gold and jewels near his capital of Tel-el-Amarna. Nor was Michael alone in his belief in this theory.

As the gate of the university was closed behind him, Michael took a last look at the wonderful scene.

Groups of woolly-haired Africans, as black as the basalt tablets in the museum, were seated on the floor of the white

marble court. Some were eating their frugal meal; some were lying on their backs resting; while others were lost in prayer. Here and there a tall *sheikh* or a professor was standing talking to a group of students, seated on the ground at his feet, his flowing robes and majestic turban proclaiming the distinction of his calling. Not one of the professors or teachers received a penny for their services; the most learned men in Egypt offered their services free. The idea and theory of the institution is beautiful and elevating.

Yet Michael knew that to Freddy the whole thing was a waste of time and an antediluvian affair. In the matter of education, the modern Egyptian would have been left hopelessly behind in the progress of the world, but for the Government schools instituted under the British occupation. These men at el-Azhar were learning nothing which could ever serve to put one penny into their pockets.

He could hear Freddy repeating his favourite words of a great modern writer, "I should always distrust the progress of people who walk on their heads. I should always beware of people who sacrifice the interests of their country to those of mankind."

Freddy had thrown the words at Michael's head hundreds of times when he had given expression to his Utopian ideas of oiling the world's creaking hinges, of preventing his predicted world-wide disaster. Michael always considered that the whole of what was termed the civilized world was "walking on its head," that only vanity could blind those who ruled and governed, only arrogance could hide the fact that the seats of the mighty were tottering.

Freddy did honestly distrust people "who walked on their heads," yet Michael thought that he would surely still more distrust the people who did not walk according to their consciences, people who lived the lives marked out for them by others, by the conventions of the world.

This old man, in his dark cell, nursed in the very bowels of Islam, had achieved his heart's desire. He had fulfilled

the purpose of his life, a purpose which to Freddy seemed useless and wasteful. That was another question. He had left a life of endless toil under the tropical sun of primitive Africa for what to Freddy would have seemed a mad purpose—to walk to Cairo and spend the last few years of his existence in the silent contemplation of God.

As he thought of the man's former life, Michael could hear his sonorous voice chanting the name of Allah in a hundred beautiful forms, as his bare brown limbs followed in the slow footsteps of a lean white camel round and round a native well.

Truly, perseverance can work miracles. Faith had moved mountains, for God had sent this pauper at the well means whereby he was to achieve his life-long prayer. Michael had been allowed to cross his path. This penniless African had never doubted, he had trusted in Allah. Conflicting doubts and arguments had delayed Michael. He had drifted, one day urged by the unconquerable voice, the next cut off from his purpose by the advice and companionship of prosperous friends. He felt that his faith would move no mountains, his perseverance perform no miracles.

Were Mohammedans more zealous than Christians? Was there in theory, in ideals, any other institution in the world like el-Azhar? These students were not paupers; this was no charitable institution. In this court were men of all social grades and professions, eager students gathered together for one purpose from every part of the Mohammedan world.

And yet Michael thought that, beautiful as it all was in theory, wonderful as was the indescribable power of Islam, it gave few, if any, of its children the true conception of God. They learned nothing of the tender Father, of the beauty of Aton. In Islam there is no consciousness of God in the song of the thrush to its mate, no sacredness in the bud of a lily. In spite of all the exquisite names by which a Moslem addresses his God, His seat is ever in the high

heavens, He still remains to him the Omnipotent God of Israel, the all-powerful Jehovah.

Even his old friend, who could visualize the joys of paradise and smell the perfume of sweet jasmine in his dark cell, did not hear God's voice in the laughing brook, or see His raiment in the blue of the lotus.

Of Akhnaton's closer and more human religion they were ignorant. These students offered obedience and reverence and complete surrender. How few of them knew even the meaning of love! This court was full of ardent students, many of whom had given up well-paid posts to study the word of Allah as revealed by the Prophet, yet scarcely one of them loved the creatures of this world because they were the things of God, because they were God. God sang to Akhnaton when spring was in the year; the birds were His visible form. God smiled to him when the blue lotus covered the waters of his lake in the garden-city of his ideal capital.

To the Moslems God is in the heavens; His immovable seat is there. To the ecstatic visionaries who live, as his old friend lived, so cut off from their natural selves as to be unconscious of their physical body, these are the delights of paradise, seen through the eyes of mystics.

Michael, who passionately loved the world and all of God that is in it, wished that they could see that the joys of paradise are everywhere around us. No visionary's eyes are needed to enjoy their beauty.

The university was now far behind him; he was retracing his steps to modern Cairo, where the calm of Islam would seem like a peaceful dream. The domes of the mosques looked like stationary balloons, made of delicate lace, floating in the blue sky, the tall minarets like lotus buds coming up from a vast lake. A soft mist was etherealizing the bald realities of the native city. Only here and there a vivid patch of colour—the jade-green dome of a saint's tomb, the clear blue or orange of an Arab boy's shirt, the brightly-appliqued *portière* of a public bath, or the purple robes of

a student of the Khedivial School—these, in their Eastern setting, studded the scene with precious gems.

Thrust back again into the vortex of noise and striving, Michael felt as "lonely as a wandering cloud." His interview with his old friend had not soothed him; it had neither helped him to determine him in his views, nor to deter him from them. His thoughts seemed a part of the surging street. Michael Ireton's counsel was still the only thing which he could grasp. He would go and find himself in the desert.

But mingled with this idea came the two other influences —the old man's vision, in which he had seen him journeying into the desert in search of some hidden treasure—and how many visionaries in Egypt had not found treasure, but had lost their lives and their minds on journeys after imaginary gold?—and Margaret's influence, Margaret, who had been given a message for him—of that he felt convinced. She, at least, could be trusted, with her sane, practical Lampton brain. She had made up no fable. Her vision had not been the result of her imagination. And then again came Freddy's voice:

"I should always distrust the progress of people who walk on their heads." The words kept recurring over and over again.

Did he, Michael, spend his life "walking on his head"? He wished that he knew.

He was passing the wide terrace of Shepheard's Hotel, where tourists enjoy afternoon-tea. The scene was cosmopolitan and gay. Michael was walking on the side-path, under the level of the terrace.

Suddenly he felt something drop lightly on his hat. He looked up, and as he did so a stephanotis flower fell into the street and his eyes were met by two of clear azure blue.

"What a brown study!" a taunting voice said. "Come and have a cup of tea."

"No, thanks," Michael said. "I'm not dressed for this sort of thing." He indicated the gaily-dressed crowd.

"I insist," Millicent Mervill said, and as she spoke, she stretched out her hand and nipped out the book Michael had in his coat-pocket. "Now you'll have to come and get it, and I'll order tea. Fresh tea, for two, please, Mohammed," she said to the waiter who was standing near her table.

Michael turned reluctantly and walked up the flight of steps which took him on to the hotel-terrace.

"How nice!" Mrs. Mervill said happily. "Now tell me where have you been. I heard you were in Cairo. Were you going back without seeing me?"

"How did you know I was in Cairo?"

"Ah, that's telling! First of all you tell me what you have been doing. You look tired." Her voice was tender. "You are not happy? And I have been very good!"

"I am tired," Michael said. "Cairo tires me after the desert. I have been to el-Azhar."

"To the university? I want to go there. If we had only gone together! Why didn't you take me?"

A strange smile changed Michael's expression. If Millicent Mervill had been there! He thought of her in that courtyard, in her luxurious modern clothes. How absurd her becoming hat would have seemed, how grotesque her daintily slippered feet! How little she divined his thoughts.

"What took you there to-day? Tell me."

"I have an old friend there, a student."

"A native, do you mean?"

"Yes, a native from the country south of Gondokoro."

"Gondokoro? How did you come to know him?" Millicent Mervill's curiosity was unlimited. Her persistence resembled the perseverance which is Islam.

"It's a long story," Michael said. "I always go to see him when I come to Cairo. He's a mystic and a religious recluse. I like him. We are great friends."

Mohammed had returned with the tea, and Michael, who was more than ready for it, lapsed into silence while he ate his Huntley and Palmer biscuits and drank his tea. His thoughts went back to el-Azhar.

His silence lasted for some time. He was very far from Shepheard's Hotel. Margaret had not forgotten her promise. She was closer than Millicent.

"You are not very polite—I have had to pump you with questions, or you would not have spoken at all. I have been patient while you drank your tea; now talk to me."

"Please forgive me, but you know I did not want to come. I was hungry and I was going back to tea. I am not good company."

"You didn't want to come?" She laughed. "Really, your rudeness is refreshing! The desert has made you worse than ever."

Michael looked into her beautiful eyes. "I am in no temper for banter. You know what I mean, you know why I didn't want to have tea with you or see you. Rudeness between us is out of the question."

"All this because you're a dear old puritan. Or is it because"—she hardened her eyes—"because you're afraid of the dark-haired girl? Has she forgiven you?" In the same breath she said, "When are we going on our journey? It's my turn soon."

"What do you mean?" he said. "I wish you wouldn't talk like that. We are going on no journey."

"You'll let me give you another cup of tea?—I'm allowed to do that much. Well, I had my fortune told two days ago by a man at the Pyramids. He's supposed to be very clever. He said I was going on a journey into the desert with a man I loved; he spoke of some great thing that was going to happen on the journey. He described you accurately. He was really very funny—I wish you could have heard him. He saw great wealth for you and some misfortunes."

Michael looked into her mischievous eyes. "They talk a lot of rot."

"Then you don't believe in that sort of thing? He saw sickness and gold and love. We were in the desert. He saw gold."

"Hush," Michael said. "You must forget all that."

"It was odd, wasn't it? You know how I have urged you to go with me. I never saw the man before; he has never seen you."

Again Michael said "Hush." Again Millicent paid no attention to him, beyond saying that it was funny that he would never allow her to talk of her love for him, when he had often told her all about his religion of love.

Again Michael said, "I refuse absolutely to be drawn into a discussion upon the subject. You are frivolous. You and I know quite well that yours is not love."

"Perhaps not your kind of love, with a big L. But call a rose by whatsoever name you will, it smells as sweet. I can't quote, but you know what I mean, and that true love without passion and passion without love are both worthless. Every fanatic has passion in his or her love. That is why they enjoy it—the scourging of the flesh, the self-denial—the body enjoys this form of self-torture for the object of its adoration. There," she said, "I will behave like the dear little innocent you first thought I was if you will come and see the Pyramids at sunset." The swift transition of her thoughts was typical of her personality.

Michael's train did not leave the station for Luxor until nine-thirty. He had nothing to do.

"If you'll come," she said, "I'll not do or say one thing to hurt you. I'll be my very nicest—and I can be nice and good now, can't I?"

"Then come," he said. "I've not been there since the 'Great Weeping.'" He used the old man's picturesque term for the inundation of the Nile.

Millicent Mervill was no fool. She meant to keep to her word, and did. The evening's excursion proved a great success and restored Michael to a more normal state of mind.

## CHAPTER XI

WHEN Michael got back to the camp there was so much genuine pleasure in being one of the trio again that he felt that it had been well worth the trouble of the journey, to be received back again so warmly and to see unclouded happiness in Margaret's smile. Her character was transparently sincere.

How radiant she looked, as Freddy and she hurried to meet him! A glad picture for tired eyes.

"Things are 'piping'!" she said eagerly, when he inquired about the "dig." "Freddy has only been waiting for you to come back before he clears out the last few days' debris from the shaft. He has been tidying up the site—it looks much more important."

Tired as Michael was after his hot journey, instinctively they turned their steps to the excavation. Things had certainly advanced greatly during Michael's absence. The deep shaft was almost cleared of rubbish; the site was tidied up and in spick-and-span order.

Michael was very soon drawn into the feeling of excitement and anticipation. Freddy, he thought, looked tired and anxious, which was, of course, only natural, for Michael knew that on his shoulders rested the entire responsibility of the "dig" and that anything might happen during the time they were waiting for the photographer and the Chief Inspector.

Michael's imagination was ever too vivid. He could see a hundred plundering hands stretched out in the darkness to seize the buried treasure. He could visualize the poisoning of the watch-dogs and the silent killing of the guards, and Freddy waking up to find that his "pet tomb" had been burgled and robbed of its ancient treasures.

A good deal of discussion ensued between Michael and Freddy which was above Margaret's head. The approximate date of the tomb and a hundred different suggestions and problems which were still beyond her knowledge were gone into by the two Egyptologists. The soothsayer's predictions were not improbable; there were evidences which suggested that the tomb was one of great importance.

"Let's get back to dinner," Freddy said. "I scarcely had any lunch—I couldn't leave the men. I'm ready for some food."

Instantly they retraced their steps. Margaret was humming softly the air of some popular song. Both she and Michael were always anxious to administer to Freddy's wishes.

"It's topping to be back," Michael said. "The smells in Cairo were pretty bad. This is glorious!"

They had almost reached the hut.

"We have only mummy smells here," Margaret said. "But they get pretty thick, as the store-room fills up with finds." She looked round. "Freddy, if I'd a little water, I could make the desert blossom like the rose." She sighed happily. "As it is, it's 'paradise enow'—I don't think I want it other than it is."

While they were at dinner, which, compared to their usual simple fare, was of the fatted-calf order and one of Margaret's devising, Michael told them of all that he had done in Luxor and Cairo, not keeping back even his excursion to the Pyramids or his visit to el-Azhar. Freddy was greatly entertained by both episodes, the one as a strong antidote to the other.

Michael had, of course, given but few details of either experience. The mystic's counsel was not, he felt, suited for discussion and certainly he had no wish to annoy Margaret by unnecessary remarks about Millicent Mervill.

There was something in Mike's manner which assured Freddy that the influence of the mystic had triumphed, that

the beautiful Millicent had not exercised her usual powers over his friend.

During the recital of his doings, Margaret met Mike's eyes frankly. Hers were without questions or doubts. She felt as Freddy did—that the woman whom she so much disliked had not again come between them. After all, the promise which she had given Michael, and which she had kept, might have availed.

As Michael had never spoken one word of love to Margaret, she had, of course, no right to expect him to behave towards her as if they were engaged; and yet there was that between them which meant far more than a mere formal proposal and acceptance of marriage. Some influence had brought them together in a manner which seemed outside themselves. They had been the closest friends from the very first. Her vision had united their interests.

Of marriage as the definite result of their close, yet indefinite intimacy, Margaret still never thought. Mike and marriage seemed qualities which separated like oil and water. All she asked of fate at present was the continuance of their unique friendship and the life which she found so absorbingly interesting. A year ago she had longed to come to Egypt, but a year ago she had never dreamed that she would become so thrilled with the excavating of a tomb which had been made for a man who probably lived before Moses. The human side of Egyptology was being revealed to her. She did not feel now as if her brother was only going to discover a fresh mummy to put away in a museum somewhere; he was going to break into the secret dwelling-house of a man who had taken his treasures with him to live for ever in the bowels of the smiling hills. There are few tombs in Egypt as the Western world thinks of tombs; there are eternal mansions, gorgeously decorated and superbly built and equipped. The abiding cities of the Egyptians were the cities of the dead.

Margaret was living on the horizon of life. Every breath of desert air was like delicious food; every dawn and

sunset stored her heart with dreams; each fresh intimacy with Michael placed a new jewel in the casket of her soul; every hour with Freddy was a privilege and a reward. In her veins the dance of youth tripped a lightsome measure. Happiness made every moment vital.

During Michael's absence she had been down the valley and up the valley and through its hidden ways; she was familiar now with the native life in the camp and with the sights and sounds of Egypt. The flight of a falcon over the Theban hills seemed as familiar to her as the bounding of a wild rabbit on the Suffolk wolds. The desolation of the valley had now become the Spirit of Peace, the Voice of Sympathy. Her jealousy was aroused at the very thought of another woman being admitted into the privacy of the camp. Being a true woman, it gave her intense satisfaction to be the only one, to be the chosen companion of her brother and of Mike.

They were always eager for her companionship. If Freddy did not want her, Mike did; if Mike had work to do which demanded perfect solitude, she felt that Freddy was not sorry. Yet they were all three such good friends that more often than not they played together delightfully childish games. It was nevertheless rather a red-letter day for either of the two men when circumstances so arranged it that Meg had to go off with one of them alone on some excursion which combined business with pleasure.

Margaret, womanlike, loved the nicest of all feelings—"being wanted." She would have liked her life to go on for ever just as it was, her society always desired by two of the dearest men in the world and her days filled with this novel and extraordinary work.

But even in the desert, things do not stand still. If they did, temples could not have been buried and cities lost. So after dinner, when Freddy, like the dear human brother that he was, allowed Michael and Margaret to spend some considerable time alone, the high gods took in hand the

affairs of these two human lives, lives which had been well content to rest on their oars and drift with the tide.

Michael had had no prearranged desire to change the conditions of their intimacy. It was beautiful. He had given no thought to himself as Margaret's lover. He had been content to be her partner in that tip-toe dance of expectation and in that state of undeclared devotion which is the life and breath of a woman's existence.

On the evening of his return to the camp he felt a new joy in Margaret's presence. Catching the sound of her voice in her coming and going about their small hut was a delicious assurance of the happiness that was to be his for some days to come. She illuminated the place and vitalized his energies. Yet this deepened pleasure told him nothing —nothing, at any rate, of what the gods had up their sleeves.

They were standing, as they had often stood before, on some high ridge of the desert cliff which overlooked its desolation and immensity. Margaret's face was star-lit; her beauty softened. As Michael gazed at her, he lost himself.

As unexpectedly to Margaret as to himself, his arms enfolded her. He told her that he loved her.

This confession of his feelings for her was so sudden, a thing so far beyond his self-control and so inevitable, that Margaret made no attempt to withstand it. The beauty of it humbled her to silence; the generosity of life and its gift to her bewildered her. Two tears rolled quickly down her cheeks.

Michael saw them and loved her all the more tenderly.

Absurd tears, when her heart could not contain all her happiness! Meg dived for her handkerchief. Michael captured her hands; he took his own handkerchief and dried her cheeks, while laughter, mingled with weeping, prevented her from speaking.

"I didn't mean to tell you, Meg," he said. "It just came out, as if it wasn't my own self who was speaking."

The humour of his words drove the tears from her eyes. Still she did not speak, but he saw the influence of her smile.

"I mean," he said, "that this other me has loved you all the time, the me that couldn't help speaking, the me that recognized the fact ever since I saw you at the ferry. How I loved the first glimpse of you, Meg!"

He drew her more closely to him. "May I love you, dearest?" He bent his head; their lips were almost touching; he held her closely. "First tell me that our friendship is love."

His breath warmed her cheeks; she could feel the tension of his body. Lost in his strength, Meg was speechless. The greatness of her love seemed a part of the wide Sahara. The stillness and his arms were lovelier than all the dreams she had ever dreamed.

His voice was a low whisper. "Meg, do you love me?" His lips had not taken their due.

Meg's fingers encircled her throat. "Love is choking me. . . . I can't speak."

Instantly Michael's head bent lower. He kissed her lips, and then, for the first time, Margaret knew what it was to be dominated by her senses. Thought fled from her; her lover's lips and his strength, for he seemed to be holding her up in a great world of impressions in which she could feel no foundation, were the two things left to her.

Michael realized that now and for ever there could be no going back. Their old state of friendship was shattered. His kiss had carried them at a rate which has no definition.

Margaret returned his love with a devout and beautiful passion. Eve had not been more certain that Adam was intended for her by God.

"Meg," he said, "how do you feel? I feel just a little afraid. I had no idea that love was like this. Had you? You have suddenly become as personal and necessary to me as my own arms or legs. You were *you* before—now you are a bit of me."

They were standing apart, facing each other, arms out-

stretched, hands in hands. Now and then the bewilderment of things made it very compelling, this desire to look and look into each other's eyes, to try to discover new characteristics born of their amazing confession.

"It's a tremendous thing," Meg said thoughtfully, "a tremendous and wonderful thing."

"If we have only lived for this one hour, it's worth it," Mike said. "To you and me it's certainly a tremendous thing."

Some lover's questions followed, questions which Margaret had to answer, the sort of questions every woman knows whom love has not passed over, questions which Margaret, with all her fine Lampton brains and common sense, did not think foolish, questions which she answered more easily and accurately than any ever set to her in college or university examinations. She answered them, too, with a fine understanding of human nature. Lampton brains were not to be despised, even in the matter of "How, when and where did you first love me?"

She knew quite well what Michael meant when he said that he was a little afraid. She, too, felt a little afraid, just because things could never be the same again. Love in Egypt seemed to become Egyptian in its immensity and power. It was a part of the desert and in the brightness of each glittering star. She doubted if she could have felt this tremendousness of love in England. Had something in the power of Egypt, in the passing of its civilization and religions, affected her senses? She could not imagine feeling, as she now felt, in Suffolk. Here, in this valley of sleeping Pharaohs, in this eternal city of a lost civilization, she had been transformed into another creature.

These thoughts jumbled themselves together in her mind, as they dawdled back to the camp, the happy dawdling of lovers.

Suddenly Michael caught her in his arms and said, "Meg, how on earth am I going to make you understand how much I love you?"

Meg read an unhappy meaning in the words. "I shall understand," she said. "I think something outside myself will help me to understand."

He turned her face up to the stars. It was bathed in light.

"You beautiful Meg, the stars adore you!"

Meg struggled and laughed. "I'm so glad my face is all right, that you like it, Mike."

Mike laughed. "I shouldn't mind if you weren't beautiful, you know I shouldn't, for you'd still be you."

Meg's practical common sense was not to be drugged by love's ether. "Dear," she said happily, "don't talk rubbish! As if you, with your artistic sense and love of beauty, would have fallen in love with me if I had turned-in-feet and a face half forehead, just because I was me."

They both laughed happily. Then Michael said, sadly and abruptly—his voice had lost its confidence—"Why have I let myself say all this, Meg? What thrust my feelings into expression, feelings I scarcely was conscious of possessing until I saw you lit up by the shining stars? I never, never planned such a thing."

"I know," Meg said. "We neither of us dreamed of it when we left the hut, did we?"

"I had a thousand other things to consult you about, to tell you," he said. "I have a thousand other things to do. I have a mission to fulfil before I speak of love. It just came, it suddenly bubbled up and poured over like water in a too-full bottle."

"Do you regret it?" Margaret said simply and sympathetically. She was not hurt; she knew what he meant; she knew that he had more than once spoken of the single-heartedness of a man's work, the work which Mike hoped to do, when he had no family ties, no woman's love to bind him, to nourish and satisfy.

"Dearest— I don't regret it," he said. "It was inevitable. Something else would have called it forth if the stars

hadn't. All the same, it is of you I am thinking . . . I had no right to . . ."

"To what, Mike?"

"I'm a drifter, Meg, and I'm not ready to be anything else—I can't be."

"I don't want you to be anything else." Meg's voice and laugh were Love. Her sincere eyes were happily confident.

"People who 'walk on their heads' don't make fortunes, beloved."

"People who think the desert is 'paradise enow' don't need fortunes."

Michael pressed the palms of her hands to his lips. "Dear strong hands," he said, "are they willing to work with mine?"

"Oh, Mike," she said. "I'm so glad, so happy! It doesn't seem fair—our world's all heaven to-night—I want others to have just a little of it."

They listened to the silence.

Michael's thoughts were of his world-state, his religion of Love, the closeness of God.

"Every star in the sky seems to know about our love," Meg said. "And I think the waiting silence has been expecting this."

"I know," Michael said. "To me love seems to be crowding the valley and flying down from the hills and searching the stillness. Life's become a new kind of thing altogether, Meg, we'll have to help each other."

"That's just what I feel. It's alarming to find yourself quite a different human being in less than an hour, to have suddenly developed unsuspected elements in your nature." She laughed. "I never thought I could be such a complete fool, dearest."

Michael kissed her rapturously. "Let's be big, big fools, beloved, let's enjoy this thing that's come to us." He paused. Again he looked troubled and serious.

"Why trouble?" Meg said. "I know just what's in your heart. You love me and I love you, and I trust you. You

weren't ready for any engagement—you never thought of marriage. Well, let all that come in good time if it is meant to be. Let us be content with love for the present. It's surely big enough." She sighed. "It's tired me, Mike, it's so enormous."

"But, dearest, I meant to talk to you about very different things. Love just caught me. . . . I was taken unawares . . . some look of yours did it, or some trick of the stars. . . . I can't tell which. Anyhow, it's done."

"Tell me," she said. "All that you had meant to talk about. It's not too late. We must be friends as well as lovers now."

"It was about my visit to el-Azhar in Cairo."

"Yes?" Meg said. Her breath came more quickly.

"My old friend told me the most extraordinary things. He had seen visions."

Their eyes met. Meg's held a question; they asked: "Had they any connection with my vision?"

"Yes," Michael said to her unspoken question. "He saw me on a long desert journey. I was often surrounded by a wonderful light—a light which, he said, had come from one of God's messengers, who was never far from me. He said he saw the messenger of God always in the midst of a great light, like the light of the sun, that he resembled no mortal he had ever seen, or any king he had ever been shown in his dreams."

Meg drew in her breath nervously. "Had he ever heard of Akhnaton, Mike?"

"No, never. He is quite unread, totally unlearned and ignorant of all except the teachings of the Koran."

Margaret's quick breathing showed her excitement. Michael, too, became nervous.

"He saw me always in the light of this great messenger, a light, he said, which surrounded his figure with rays like the rays of the sun."

"Just as I saw him," Meg said. "How strange! How wonderful!"

"He spoke of trials and temptations and, strangest of all, of much gold. He saw the treasure very clearly and repeatedly—much fine gold, he was certain of that."

"How are you to discover it?" Meg spoke dubiously. Her practical mind was fighting against the absurdity of the thing.

"He could not tell me. In the desert I was to be led by a little child—you know what that means?"

"Yes, a simple, a child of God."

They paused.

"Now the odd thing is," Michael said thoughtfully, "that when I went to see Michael Ireton, he strongly advised me to go and find myself, as he expressed it, in the desert. He said, 'Cut yourself off from your friends, from opposing influences, and think things out. Go where you are called.' "

"He meant Freddy's opposing influence?"

"I suppose so. Freddy's character is stronger than mine, and we have opposite views."

"Are you going?" Meg's voice betrayed a new anxiety and sadness.

"I meant to." His eyes spoke of his new reluctance. "That was why I had no right to speak—I really wanted to go."

"This must make no difference—it must help you."

"But I shall want to be with you—it's hard to go."

"If you stayed, you would be restless, dissatisfied."

"I know." He laughed. "I want both to 'walk on my head,' Meg, and stand firmly on my two legs—my legs are for a home for you."

"And your head?"

"Oh," he said, "for anything that is upside down to what it is now, for the total destruction of obsolete and effete monuments, for exchanging new principles for those that are worn out with age, for showing that fundamental truths are not made by empire-builders, that the world is God's

Kingdom, not man's, that God is the only monarch whose throne is not tottering."

"Yes," Meg said. "I suppose destruction must come before the building up, your task of pulling down, of clearing out the corner-stones, of cleansing the temple."

"I know," Michael said. "It's the way with 'cranks.' We all of us jaw about destroying and offer no new plans for reconstruction." He paused. "But it's rather like the problem of cleaning out a too-full house—you can't really get rid of the dust unless you first of all clear the whole thing out, empty it."

"You want to abolish so much, Mike."

"All the rubbish," he said. "All the hindrances. I want to let in light."

"Beginning with kings," Meg said, tantalizingly. The voice was Freddy's.

"I've no rooted objection to kings, as human mortals," he said. "I suppose half the monarchs in Europe, and certainly our own included, are very good men, very anxious for their kingdom's prosperity, if not for their people's development. It's the condition of affairs which tolerates such an obsolete form of government. If the king is merely a picturesque figure-head, like the carved heads of Venus on a vessel's prow, I'd have no objection, but a despotic and vain peacock like the Kaiser, who turns his subjects into military instruments, in my opinion wants destroying along with the other rubbish."

"But to go back," Meg said, "to your old friend in el-Azhar—do tell me more about him."

"He's a splendid old warrior," Michael said tenderly. "When you think of what he's achieved, isn't he wonderful? I wish you could see him."

"The force of will-power, of concentration," Meg said. "I suppose he has never thought of anything else all his life, but this one dream of el-Azhar."

"That's it," Mike said. "But what gives these Moslems that wonderful power of mind-control?" Mike paused.

"Now, here am I," he said. "I came out with you to-night meaning to tell you that I was going away."

"Oh," Meg said. "Not yet—not until the tomb is opened? Surely not?"

"No, not until the tomb is opened—I had no intention of that."

She sighed. "That would be too awful."

Michael kissed her. "How nice of you!" he said. "You really wanted me?"

"Of course! I have visualized the opening of the tomb —you and I crawling down the 'dig,' with Freddy waiting at the foot to show us his treasures. You couldn't have gone!"

"No," he said, "I couldn't. But I wanted to tell you that I was going soon after. I was going for reasons that only my own heart understood. And then what did I do? I told you that I loved you! I forgot everything but you, dearest. Before I knew it, I had spoken of what it might have been wiser to keep hidden away in my heart, with all my other mad dreams."

"But why, Mike? I should have been so very unhappy, so wretched. As it is, I am just bursting with happiness. I wouldn't change anything for worlds—not one tiny thing!"

"If you are contented," he said, "and understand, then it may not have been unwise, untrue to Freddy's trust in me."

"Oh," Meg said, "you dear, why, Freddy adores the very ground you walk on! He chaffs you, but he simply thinks no end of you."

"He doesn't want a drifter for a brother-in-law, if he's any common sense in his head. I'm the last husband he'd choose for his sister."

"But, Mike, how can you?"

"Yes, Meg, there are times when I don't 'walk on my head,' when I see with Freddy's sane eyes. It's what he'd call damned cheek of me to speak of love to you."

"I'd have called it horrid, if you hadn't."

"You delicious Meg, would you really?"

"Yes, I would, horrid and cruel. I'd have imagined you really cared for . . ." she paused and then went on tenderly, ". . . no, I won't say it, Mike."

"Really cared!" he said. "Why, you have taught me what that word means. You'll never doubt that?"

"No," Meg said. "Not now. I know this is new to us both. I won't doubt anything ever again."

"She was friendless," he said. "And for some strange reason she thought herself fond of me."

"What a very strange thing to feel! I really can't understand it. Fancy a woman feeling fond of a thing that walks on its head!"

"Don't laugh, Meg. She does, or thinks she does."

Meg looked into his eyes. "I'll never doubt you, Mike," she said, "if you'll tell me, under these dear stars, which have made you confess your love for me, that there has been no deep feeling on your side, that there is nothing that matters between you."

Mike took her two hands. "On my side, there has been nothing but friendship, I swear it," he said. "I never, never desired anything else. There has been nothing that matters."

"I'm so glad," Meg said. "You're so high, Mike, so awfully high in my love. Your drifting is all a part of it. I love you for all your mad dreams and dear unworldliness, for your struggling and striving for the highest. I should hate to have to believe that you were less high than I imagined."

"But I kissed her, Meg," he said, abruptly. The truth was drawn from him, as his confession of love had been, torn from him by some power outside himself. He hated giving her pain, and it had been scarcely necessary if Margaret had been other than she was.

It had not mattered—yet if truth was beauty and beauty was God, and his religion was that the kingdom of God is

within us, how could he hold it back, this deed which, little as it might seem in the eyes of most people, had been for him a thing which did matter?

"You kissed her?" Meg said. Something that was not love was now bursting her throat. Her voice was uncertain. It hurt Michael like a thrust from a sharp knife.

"Yes," he said. "I kissed her, more than once."

"Her lips?" Meg asked.

"Yes, Meg, her lips."

"You kissed her as you have kissed me to-night?"

"Good heavens, no!" he cried. "Meg, how could you think it?"

"Life is strange," Meg said, a little wearily. "When everything seems most beautiful, some ugliness shows its head . . . the light gets so dim."

"Dearest," Mike said, "do you remember what you said on that morning when we found each other again? You said, 'Let's go forward; things are explained.'"

"Yes, I remember," she said, and as she spoke happiness shone in her eyes like a flame relit; "yes, I said regrets were foolish, I said I understood. But . . ." she hesitated; the thought of Mike's lips pressed to any other woman's than her own stifled her. She was his so completely, that any other man's lips pressed to hers, except Freddy's, would nauseate her. Yet Mike had kissed Millicent. Was it that night on the terrace, or the evening at the Pyramids? she wondered.

"We have gone forward, Meg. Millicent"—Meg shivered as he said the woman's Christian name—"was splendid at the Pyramids, she really was."

Again Meg shivered. Splendid! How, she wondered, had she been splendid? Meg hated being an inquisitor, yet she had to know; it was her right.

"Then it was not at the Pyramids that you kissed her?" she asked.

"No, no!" Mike said. "Of course not!" He looked at

her in wonder. "If it had been, I should not have dared to kiss you to-night."

"It's nice of you to say that, dear. Oh, Mike," she said tenderly, "you mean the world to me! I shall grow older by years for each moment that we don't trust one another! I should have known, I should never have doubted! You've chosen a very jealous woman, Mike."

"If you'd gone off to the Pyramids with some one whom I disliked as much as you dislike Millicent, I'd have been furious!" He felt Meg shiver. He divined the reason; he would not let that hurt her again. "You hate her, Meg," he said. "Just in the way I'd hate a man who . . ." he paused.

"Who what?" Meg said.

"Don't ask me," he said. "I never forgot you for one moment when I was with her at the Pyramids. You kept close to me, dearest. And the other episode is past and forgotten—it was just a little bit of vulgarity, Meg, nothing more."

"Since we made friends, there's been nothing between you that would make your kisses to me a mere vulgarity, Mike?"

"Nothing," he said. "And so far as I can help it, I will never see Mrs. Mervill again."

Meg's eyes spoke her thanks. His avoidance of the woman's Christian name showed his sensitiveness to her feelings. Speaking of her as "Mrs. Mervill" put her pleasantly far away.

"I was weak and insincere—my kisses were really a dishonour to any woman, and I hated myself."

While Meg admired her lover for refraining from the excuse which Adam was not ashamed to offer His Maker, what was human in her longed to make him denounce the woman she hated. She had tried to provoke a justification of his own conduct from his lips by telling her what she felt to be the truth—that the woman had tempted him.

It was getting late; they turned towards the hut.

"We must go in," Meg said. "Freddy will be wondering what has become of us." She turned swiftly and took Michael's hands in hers. "Until after the tomb is opened, let us remain as we were—I mean, don't let's give Freddy any more to think about. Isn't he the dearest brother in the world?" she said. "I love every glittering hair of his head!"

"Very well, you dearest woman," Mike said. "Besides, we've only confessed that we love each other—I've asked for no promise, Meg—I've no right to. Remember, you are free, absolutely free—this old drifter isn't to count."

"Absolutely free!" Meg laughed. "Just as if words made us free! Four walls do not a prison make! You know perfectly well that I am tied hand and foot and bound all round about with the cords of your love. I can never be free again, never belong only to myself, as I used to do."

"And will you remember that whatever happens to me, Meg, it will be just the same?"

She knew that he was referring to his mystical journey, his unsettled future.

"It would be so heavenly," she said dreamily, "if we could be content to sit down and be happy and just live for the enjoyment of each other's love!"

"You'd despise me if I did." He looked round at the eternal valley, resting in the stillness of death.

"I suppose I should," Meg said. "I suppose I want you to take up arms for what Freddy calls your 'Utopian Rule of Righteousness,' your world-state."

"I think we should both feel slackers, just enjoying ourselves intellectually, dear, when we could, if we chose, let a few others into the great kingdom of God. You and I don't understand why they don't all see it as we do, why they don't realize the things Akhnaton knew three thousand years ago. We wonder why they remain contented with a religion of limited dogmas and theological forms. They don't see the obvious in their striving after doctrines. They fail to see that God is too big for their churches."

"You see these things," Meg said. "I'm only creeping behind you."

"You see that if we understand God and give Him His proper place, He'd rule us, His throne would govern a world-state. His love would be the law of mankind."

"I know," Margaret said. "It's beautiful, it's what ought to be, if poor mortals were not human beings."

"Mortals are the best things in God's kingdom—it's all been worked up for their enjoyment and benefit."

"I know, dear, I know, but you and I are just you and I, and we have just found love, and it is so wonderful, I want to enjoy it."

"Doesn't love make it all the more forcible, Meg? The closeness of God all the more certain? The weaving of the threads of His beautiful fabric all the more golden?—Akhnaton's great 'Lord of Fortune,' the 'Master of Things Ordained,' the 'Chance which gives Life,' the 'Origin of Fate,' call it what you will—the power which brought us here, you and I."

"And if we didn't follow that clear voice, Mike, whose rule is righteousness, why should He allow it?"

"Do we ever deliberately do what we know to be wrong and not pay for it, dearest?"

"But why does He allow it? It's a mill, dearest—one can go round and round, and round and round."

"And in the end," Mike said, "it's just God, His prescribed rule, His unfightable force."

. . . . .

When the two lovers entered the sitting-room, Freddy was instantly as conscious of the new aura which surrounded them as he was conscious of the sweet desert air which clung to their clothes and bodies. It came like a whiff from a far pure world.

"How fuggy you are in here," Meg said. "Dear boy, stop working."

"All right," he said. "I was only waiting for you to come in." Freddy was not the sort to see anything which

e must go in," Meg said. "Freddy [illegible] religion would
has become of us." She turned [illegible] and teach-
ael's hands in hers. "Until after the [illegible] person who
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more to think about. Isn't he the [illegible] people who be-
world?" she said. "I love every gl[illegible] into the future.
ead!"

"Very well, you dearest woman," Mi[illegible] Until she ar-
we've only confessed that we love each [illegible] under the head-
for no promise, Meg—I've no right [illegible] different now.
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in. Her beautiful honesty did not permit
ions tormented her. It was like having a
ace. If she could only get rid of her Lamp-
tic, common-sense nature, she would be more
and counsel her lover. Poor Meg! Thoughts
fought for coherence all night.

knew that her nature was the perfect adjust-
Michael's needed. He came to her, not only as
as a tired traveller in search of rest. Her rea-
and cautious nature gave him balance. When
a standing on his head for too many hours to-
g put him on his feet again.

rning Meg needed putting on her own feet. She
ssly tormented with questions which she could not
One minute Michael's whole scheme ought to be
ged; his belief in the occult was a thing to be sup-
it was dangerous and unhealthy. The next, she
herself with energies vitalized and glowing over the
ty that there must be truth in the idea, that there
e some meaning in the repeated messages conveyed
by dreams or by whatsoever one chose to call them.
ghts certainly had been conveyed to him.

en the glowing vision of Michael actually discovering
st treasure of Akhnaton would vanish and she would
im, just as clearly, alone and ill in the desert, in lack
nds and abandoned by his men. She knew his casual
ods of making practical arrangements and his total
gard for his personal health and safety.

he was watching the coming dawn while her thoughts
e creating misfortunes and calling up unhappy visions
Michael alone in the desert. The old man at el-Azhar
l spoken of temptations and sickness. If the treasure
s a fact, then the sickness and temptation were facts
o. But what were the temptations? Did he allude to
e spiritual or the material man?

Suddenly her thoughts were obliterated, her self-inflicted
uffering wiped out. She had no thoughts, no conscious-

ness; for her nothing existed but the luminous and wonderful figure of Akhnaton which had formed itself in front of her. At first her astonished eyes had seen it dimly, then clearly and still more clearly.

Meg remained perfectly still. She was too awestruck, too amazed, to move or speak. The vision became surrounded by light, by the rays of Aton. It was months since she had first seen it; now in the dawn, it seemed as if it had only been the night before. A sense of rest came to her as she gazed at it.

"Thy dawning is beautiful in the horizon of heaven,
O living Aton, Beginning of Life!
When thou risest in the eastern horizon of heaven,
Thou fillest every land with thy beauty;
For thou art beautiful, great, glittering, high over the earth,
Thy rays, they encompass the land, even all thou hast made."

Meg listened intently to the words They were part of Akhnaton's Hymn to the Rising Sun, the hymn which Mike had repeated to her.

She waited until the words were lost in the silent hour. Every thought of hers was known to the sad eyes, every longing in her heart to be given power to speak was understood. It seemed to come naturally to her, the understanding of the needlessness for her to do aught but listen. The vision was her over-soul, her higher self, which understood.

"You have delivered my message. I have seen, I have approved. The Lord of Peace, the Living Aton, besides whom there is none other, has brought Life to his heart. The beauty of Aton is there."

It was of Michael the vision spoke. Meg never doubted. "His pleasure is to do thy bidding," she said. The words were the unstudied, simple truth.

"I have seen, always I have guided, always I have prayed. I have revealed to him the Light which is Truth. His work, which is the Love of Aton, is in his heart. The Lord of Fate has perfected it."

"I would have him go, and yet, because I am not fully in the Light, I would have him stay. All that is in my heart

is plain to you—my fears, my joys, my imperfect faith. I ask for help; I am troubled."

"There is no poverty, no fear, for those who have set Aton in their hearts; for my servant there is no danger. Hearts have health where Aton shines."

"But for me—how can I help him?"

"By the perfection of Love."

"But my love is imperfect. It is not divine. I fear for his bodily welfare. I cannot willingly offer him to the Aton of whom you speak. I can only understand my own selfish love . . . it is human."

"You are the mistress of his happiness. In my Kingdom, while it was on earth, my heart was happy in my Queen and in my children. The great Lord and Giver of Light is none other than the Loving Father, the tender husband, the devoted son. There is none other than the living Aton, whose kingdom is within us. We are Love, we are Aton."

"Then my love is no hindrance?"

"God is Love, God is Happiness, God is Beauty."

There was infinite understanding and tenderness in the words, but Meg's honesty was persistent.

"My love is not that sort of love, but it is very dear to me. It is selfish and human. It is wrapped round with natural desires, my own personal wants."

"Is there any love which is not of Aton? Does He expect things other than He has made?"

"I am in darkness; I have so many fears."

"Your soul is not shut off from that which it desires. Your fears can be turned to understanding; no forces of darkness can hold against the powers of Light. If you open your heart to the Living Truth, the powers of darkness are disarmed. Aton is enthroned. He is the sole creator of all things created."

The sky was changing from a cold grey to the opalescence of dawn. A line of light was slowly appearing and widening on the horizon. As it spread and grew more dis-

tinct, the luminous figure became less clear; the rays of Aton shone less vividly. Akhnaton's spirit had come forth from the Underworld to see the sun rise on the world he so passionately loved. This had been one of his most insistent and ardent prayers while he reigned on earth, that after death his "two eyes might be opened to see the sun," that "the vision of the sun's fair face might never be lost to him," that he might "obtain a sight of the beauty of each recurring sunrise."

Meg stood in an awed silence, her subliminal self alone conscious of the grave, sad eyes, which were watching the splendour of the sun as it came over the edge of the desert. The rapidity of its uprising was amazing. It had burst the bonds of darkness with a strength and force which resembled the triumph of a victorious army. At its coming the darkness was scattered. Its quickly-spreading rays were driving back the forces of the enemy. With fine generalship it was following up the victory with renewed attacks.

The form of the Pharaoh was only dimly visible. Its luminousness had disappeared. It was a shadow in the light. The prayer of all Egyptians from time immemorial had been that they might each day "leave the dim Underworld in order to see the light of the sun upon earth." Akhnaton had prayed this prayer, which was ancient before his day.

Meg knew that his prayer had been answered. Akhnaton, the King, the passionate heretic, the visionary and the prophet, was seeing his adored Sun rising over his kingdom. His persistent prayers had been granted, his desire realized. His spirit had come forth to see the sun's rays. As he gazed at the sun, the years had rolled back. Three thousand years are but a span in the march of eternity. He was alone with his God, as alone as the Moslem figures who were prostrating themselves to the ground. He was enjoying the beauty of Aton in the silent valley, which his footsteps had so often trod, the valley overlooking the city

which to him, in his manhood, became the city of abomination and desolation, the city of false gods.

As the light of day flooded the desert, the figure became invisible to Meg. It seemed to melt into the golden air. She felt that it might still be standing there, quite close to her, only she could not see it. Her powers were limited; the light concealed the figure. Being luminous, she had been able to see it clearly in the darkness, just as she was able to see the luminous match-box which she always kept on a table by her bedside. She knew it was there, always shining, only her eyes were unable to see its brightness in the daylight. The figure of Akhnaton might be near her still. How clearly it had stood out in the darkness, how brightly the rays of the sun had declared the symbol of Aton!

Had it all been an optical delusion, born of her nervous condition? Or was it a dream? Was she still in bed sleeping? How could she prove to herself that she was awake, that she had come out to see the dawn, that she was standing in front of her hut and not asleep in bed? In her dreams, she had often dreamed that she was dreaming; she had often told herself that her dreams were all dreams; she had often done things in her dreams to prove to herself that they were not dreams. If she stooped to pick up some sand to prove that her feet were pressing the desert, might not that, too, be a part of her dream? What on earth was there to prove the real from the unreal?

Now that she knew about Akhnaton and his beautiful religion, which is the religion of all reasoning mortals today, and had read something of his life and mission, was it not quite probable that she was creating all that she had seen, that she was deceiving herself? It was still possible that she was dreaming.

With nerves unstrung and a beating heart, she saw Michael appear. He was in his early-morning top-coat. He, too, had been greeting the sun. He had made a hasty sketch of the first colours in the sky.

"Mike," Meg cried, in a tone of relief and anxiety. "Mike, I want you, do come here!"

The next moment Mike's arms were round her; her head was on his shoulder.

"What is the matter, dearest?"

"The vision, Mike! I have seen it again—it has been even more wonderful. Oh, Mike!" A stifled sob came from Margaret's full heart; the tension of her nerves was relaxed by the comfort of human arms, of human magnetism.

"And you were afraid, dearest?" He held her closer; his strength nerved her. Oh, welcome humanity!

"Afraid? No—oh no, it wasn't fear."

"What then, dear one?"

"I can't explain it. If only you had been with me!" She clung to him.

"I should not have seen him, Meg, it is not meant that I should. Look, darling, I have been near you—I was making a sketch of the sunrise."

Meg looked in wonder at the sketch. There was no figure there; that was the only point of interest it contained for her at the moment.

"It is not there," she said disappointedly; her voice expressed astonishment. "Then you saw nothing?"

"Nothing of what you saw."

"Then why does it come to me? I am the very last person to understand, to desire it."

"Dearest, the wisdom of God's ways is past our present very limited understanding. Why did He make the world as He did? Why did He form the mountains by the drifting of particles into the ocean? Why did He evolve the spirit of man from a source which has baffled science? Why does He let us know so much and understand so little?"

"I loved seeing him, Mike. He talked to me. I wasn't afraid while he was there. It's the wonder of it now that it's past, the strangeness; something greater than myself gets into me when the vision is there."

"Consider the privilege, Meg, the amazing privilege!"

Mike's brain was working and wondering. Why, oh why, had he not been privileged? Why had Meg again seen the Living Truth?

Meg divined his thoughts; her fervent wish was that he also had seen it. "Nothing further from fear ever possessed me, Mike, and yet now I feel horribly unnerved. If you hadn't come to me, I don't know what I should have done. The first time it was different. I wonder why. I wasn't a bit like this, was I, dearest?"

"No, I don't know why you feel so differently this time. What happened? Can you tell me, or would you rather wait?" Mike recognized her nervous state.

"I came out to see the sunrise. I hadn't slept—I was thinking about the opening of the tomb and of all that is to happen afterwards." Mike kissed her tenderly and understandingly. "I was really feeling very selfish and worldly and anything but spiritual. I was wondering if your plans weren't too utterly silly, dearest, if, after all, we hadn't got into a rather unreal and unhealthy way of looking at things. I was almost convinced that you ought to stop standing on your head. Quite suddenly the luminous figure, with the sunrays behind its head, stood in front of me. Its eyes were fixed on me with a full and wonderful understanding of all that was in my heart. I instantly knew that my fears were understood, and the odd thing, now that I look back upon it, is that I wasn't afraid. The understanding seemed natural, the understanding of my higher self. It was only when the vision grew dimmer and dimmer that I began to feel this silly nerve-exhaustion; it was only then that I began to wonder and doubt."

"I'm not surprised, Meg—you're splendid. Any other woman would have fainted, I suppose."

"No, Mike, they wouldn't; once you've seen and understood, it is like being born again, with fresh understanding, with fresh eyes. There's nothing more to be afraid of than there is in seeing death. I was terrified of death

until I saw Uncle Harry die. This is just the same thing. Your fear is forgotten, a new understanding possesses you. My only wonder is why I have never seen anything of the same sort before, and now why, oh why, is it this strange figure of Akhnaton? Why this King who lived thirteen hundred years before we begin to count our centuries? I should so love to see Uncle Harry, and it is such a little time since he went. Why have I never seen him?"

"My darling, three thousand years are like the minutes spent in boiling an egg when you dabble with eternity. There is nothing to choose between Noah and Napoleon; Moses and Mohammed are twins in point of years."

"I know," Meg said. "There is nothing so hard for a human mind to grasp as the impossibility of grasping the meaning of infinity. It can't shake off its own limitations. But all the same, if I was to tell anyone except you, dearest, that I had seen and held a conversation with the spirit of a Pharaoh who lived before Moses, what would they think? what would they say?"

"The very few who stand in the Light would not be astonished. Those who are still completely earth-tied and glory in their ignorance would scoff and call you crazy; but would they matter?"

"There was one thing he told me, Mike, which gives me great happiness. He called me 'the mistress of your happiness,' he understood about our love."

"That was his favourite name for his wife. He was a devoted husband and lover."

"Then he really understood?"

"What does Aton not understand, beloved?"

"But this was Akhnaton, Mike. He said, 'my heart was happy in my Queen.' He said 'the great Giver of Light is none other than the loving father, the tender husband, the devoted son, because there is none other than the living Aton, whose kingdom is within you. You are Aton and Aton is you. He is everything which He has made.'"

"That is exactly it," Mike said. "You saw the figure of

Akhnaton just as people who lived in Syria saw the figure of Christ—God's manifestation of Himself. Of course He understood our love and our happiness. His bowels of compassion yearn for His children. He is the spirit of Aton—of God—as manifested by Akhnaton."

"You are to go, beloved, there is to be no holding you back. I have received my commission; it is to buckle on your armour. Oh, dearest, even if all this should be the fabrication of my own dreams, my brain, it is not self-created—it has some purpose, some meaning. God has put it there."

"Everything has its meaning, Meg, nothing is too small to be intentional."

"I am to help you by 'the perfection of my love,' and oh, Mike, it is so imperfect, so pitifully imperfect, so pitifully human!"

"Pitifully, darling? Why not beautifully human?"

"Because it thinks first of my own wants; my love makes me wish to keep you all to myself, to prevent you going on this journey."

"The beautiful thing about Akhnaton's teachings, beloved, is the value of happiness, the beauty of humanity. In this capital he gave his people wonderful gardens and decorated his public places and temples with the simple joys of nature; he encouraged music and art and everything that could give his people happiness. He desired his people to enjoy the world, he wanted them to see it as he saw it, a wonderful kingdom, radiating with love. He first taught the world that there need be no sickness or misery if there was no sin. Light disperses darkness. His was the purest and highest religion the world was ever given until the mission of Jesus Christ. The rays of Aton first symbolized the divinity of God."

The voice of Mohammed Ali brought the lovers back to the practical things of the hour—a hot bath and the necessity of dressing and eating a good breakfast. For the time being, the opening of the tomb had been forgotten.

Indeed, Meg found it very hard to bring herself into touch with all which had been until this morning the absorbing topic for days past.

She had a number of household duties to attend to as soon as breakfast was over—putting in order the room for the Overseer-General and devising the menu for the day's food. There were to be extra mouths to feed—the photographer, the Chief Inspector and a few invited fellow-Egyptologists who had been asked for the occasion. It was Freddy's day.

Before they parted to get ready for breakfast Meg said: "I suppose Freddy will be quite lost to us until the hour arrives! I wonder when we shall be permitted to see inside it?" She referred to the tomb.

"Not to-day," Mike said. "At least, I don't expect so. Perhaps to-morrow. Anyhow, we shall hear all that Freddy has to tell us to-night or at lunch-time."

"Poor old Freddy! I shall be relieved when the thing is over, when he can settle down to regular work again. There will be lots to do, won't there?"

"You look tired," Mike said. Meg's eyes were deeply shadowed.

"Do you wonder? I've lived three thousand years in half an hour. I've been born again, so to speak. I really feel only half here. Oh, Mike," she said, impulsively, "I wish I knew more! I should so like to quite believe, to understand. I can never be the same again, not my careless, young, old self." She sighed.

"Do you regret it?"

"No, only I feel different, not quite so close to earth, lonely. I can't explain. I wonder how Lazarus felt? I know I'm alive, dearest, and here with you, but—don't laugh or think me hysterical—in some other way, a way I can't speak about, I feel as if I had been dead and come back. I've seen what no one else has, I've been where neither you nor Freddy have been."

"With those whose existence is in 'the hills of the West.' "

"A cold tub will do me good, dearest." Meg hurried off.

The sun was pouring its full wonder over the land. The mystery of the dawn was as if it had never been. Egypt was bathed in light, the fullest light that ever was on land or sea.

## CHAPTER XIII

THE great hour had arrived. Margaret and Michael were on their way to see the inside of the tomb, which had proved to be greater by far in importance and splendour than even the Arab soothsayer had predicted. It was, in fact, a tomb of unique interest, a tomb whose history was to baffle the most expert Egyptologists. Freddy had kept the wonder of it a secret from Mike and Margaret. He had told them practically nothing. He wished to give them a surprise.

It had been inspected and photographed and all the necessary formalities had been gone through, and now, after an admirably borne period of waiting, Michael and Margaret were to be allowed to visit it.

Freddy was to await their arrival on the actual site, either in the tomb itself or outside it.

As Michael and Margaret hurried through the valley and climbed the hill, leading down into the side valley which held the tomb, they spoke very little to each other. Their hearts were full of an intense excitement. Freddy's silence had prepared them for something unusual.

The sun was blazing like a furnace in the valley; a hot wind was blowing from the Sahara. Meg and Michael were too excited to be conscious of their surroundings. Their feet took them mechanically to the scene of operations.

The tomb had been photographed before any modern had set foot in it.

Very hot and very excited, they at last arrived at its entrance, which was guarded by two important-looking Egyptian policemen in modern uniforms. Until Michael and Margaret had satisfactorily proved to them that they had come to assist Effendi Lampton and that they were members of his camp, they were not permitted to go near the aperture.

Their identity being established, they at last began their descent down the deep shaft into the tomb. The hot air which ascended in puffs from the depths below scorched their faces. Meg felt stifled. Still hotter air met them as they continued their descent.

One of the Arab workmen helped Meg by going on in front and making himself into a pillar for her to rest against when she lost her footing. Her foot slipped and stumbled in the soft debris, yet pluckily she always managed to reach the stately Arab. Each time she reached him, she would halt and take a little breath, and with renewed forces she would stumble on a few paces further. It was a very undignified proceeding and an exhausting one.

At last they reached the level of the tomb; they could safely raise their eyes. As they did so, Meg gave a sharp cry of surprise. Never in the world had she imagined such a wonderful, wonderful sight. A glitter of gold and white and the gleam of precious stones and the brilliant hues of vivid enamels, caught her eyes. Freddy was holding an electric torch in one hand, while with the other he picked up as fast as he could from the ground the bits of carnelian and turquoise and blue *lapis-lazuli* which lay scattered at his feet. Margaret could see nothing clearly; after the darkness, things were all blurred. But she recognized the friendly cigarette-boxes; they were there, and Freddy was filling them as fast as his one hand would allow him. Thousands of mummy-beads powdered the floor with bright blue.

The white walls showed a wealth of colour in their paintings.

Freddy was in his white flannels; his modern athletic figure seemed oddly incongruous. He looked up as they appeared.

"Hallo, Meg! Take care—stay where you are—don't move one step further."

He instantly stopped his work and came to their assistance.

"You can't walk too softly or be too careful. All these things are as brittle as burnt egg-shells—the slightest jar may shatter them to atoms." His voice was full of eager happiness.

"Oh, Freddy," Meg said. "It's too wonderful! I never imagined such a scene. You darling!" She hugged his arm.

"Wait a bit," Freddy said. "There's better things to come. I say, Mike, keep your coat close to you—that's right. Now, step like cats."

All three became silent as they picked their way gingerly; their advance required a nicety and precision of step which permitted of no talking or examination of the scene which enthralled them.

At last they reached an inner chamber, the actual tomb itself. An exclamation of amazement burst from both Michael and Margaret simultaneously. It certainly was an extraordinary scene which met their gaze.

"Good heavens!" Mike said, while Meg caught hold of Freddy's arm. She was afraid lest their loud cry might shatter the vision before their eyes. Would it vanish with the coming of the light as the figure of Akhnaton had vanished two mornings before?

A queen, dressed as a bride, in all the magnificence of old Theban splendour, lay stretched at full length on the floor; her arms were folded across her breast, her face dignified by the repose of death, the repose of a Buddha, whose eyes have seen beyond.

This royal effigy was so magnificent, its colours were so untarnished, that light seemed to radiate from the still figure. Here the might of royalty had defied time.

Meg and Mike saw nothing but the bridal figure; they had eyes for it alone, its pathos, its dignity.

Freddy pointed to a coffin which lay near the queen. It was empty; one side of it had been smashed open. A brown and shrivelled mummy, a ghastly object, had fallen out. It lay quite close to the brilliant effigy. Surely this was the skeleton at the feast?

Meg shrank back. In the hot tomb a chill struck her heart. This poor brown object was the real queen. Here time had triumphed.

She looked again, while Freddy held the torch nearer. A vulture with outstretched wings, the ancient emblem of divine protection, cut out of flat gold, sat upon the forehead of the mummy. Its left claw had slipped into the empty eye-socket. A row of long white teeth gaped threateningly up to the roof. The lips had dried and withered until they had become as hard as brown leather. Alas for human vanity! Those lips had once been a lover's, those lips had once responded to human caresses and desires!

Meg's flesh shrank. It was horrible. It was wrong to pry upon this pitiful object which centuries had hidden from man's sight, this humiliation of royal power. Nothing could have illustrated more vividly the mockery and the futility of human greatness. The ghastly cheeks, covered with something which had once been human flesh, the menacing teeth, the embalmed skull, sickened Meg.

For relief she turned her eyes once more to the sublime effigy, to the waiting bride. Her chamber had been furnished with the lavish indulgence of an ardent bridegroom.

Michael was standing by Margaret's side. Her hand caught his; human contact was essential.

The coffin which had once held the mummy had rested on a beautiful wooden trestle, which had been covered with a golden canopy. The legs of the trestle had given way,

probably with the weight of the coffin, for the wood had become as brittle and dry as fine egg-shell. With the fall the mummied body had rolled out and landed on the ground.

This, Freddy conjectured, was the explanation of the apparent desecration of the tomb.

After they had looked at all that Freddy could show them until more work had been accomplished, at the two figures which occupied the tomb, the one so abject and distressing, the other so magnificent and romantic, and at the furniture which appeared to Meg to have been made only the day before, in spite of Freddy's warning that a breath of cold air would disperse it before their eyes, he told them that "time was up."

Meg's astonishment had increased with the examination of every object—the carved wooden armchair, which appeared to belong to the best Empire period; the exquisite wedding-chest, of lacquer, the blues and greens of its floral decorations still daringly brilliant and vivid—they were far brighter and more perfect than any decorations which a faker of antiquities would dare to perpetrate.

"But, surely," she said at last, when they had come to the end, "this furniture's just pure Empire? Look at it, Mike." She pointed to the exquisite armchair, an object too beautiful and rare for mere human forms to rest in; then she made him examine the couch. A portion of its fine cane seating had given way. Had a ghostly form sat on it? "I thought the French copied their Empire furniture from ancient Greek models?" she said.

"Well, if they did, here we have it in all its perfection," Freddy said. "In Egypt you'll find the originals of more than Empire furniture. The thing is, where did the Egyptians get *their* models from? None of the Louis's ever gave their Pompadours, nor Napoleon his Josephine, anything as beautiful as that." He pointed to the casket.

"And the very air which keeps us alive will destroy these," said Meg. "It's odd, the way which things that

have existed intact for three thousand years without air will be killed by it!"

"Have you any definite ideas about that figure?" Mike referred to the mummy. "Whose is it?"

"The whole thing is very bewildering. The tomb obviously hasn't been plundered, for nothing of any value is missing, and yet, as you can see, some of the gold wrappings have been torn from the mummy, certain things have been defaced on the walls—the tomb is not as it was when the body was first laid here."

"No," Mike said. "Obviously not. The entrance has been tampered with and those outer walls built; and look at all that debris in the shaft. Yet, as you say, the obvious things of intrinsic value have not been removed."

Meg pointed to a recess in the wall; it still held the canopic jars. Their lids were splendidly formed out of head-portraits of the queen. Meg knew their meaning, their use; they held the intestines of the dead. The Biblical expression, "bowels of compassion," always came to her mind when she looked at canopic jars. These jars had their significance.

A very good significance, too, she thought, for certainly our bowels are highly sensitive organs, responding and acting in complete sympathy with our mental condition. And who can say for certain where our compassions are seated, our sensibilities and sympathies? Why not, as the Egyptians thought, in our bowels rather than in our brains? "Joseph's bowels did yearn upon his brother Benjamin."

"Then you have no idea who the queen was?" Meg said.

"Not yet," Freddy said. "But we shall know. No Egyptian could enter into his future abode without his name. It was always plainly and repeatedly written on the embalmed mummy. His identification was absolutely essential."

"What a help to Egyptologists!" Meg said.

"Probably her name will be written on these golden wrappings and on the scarabs, if we find any. Nothing has

been done yet. This precaution of the ancients, in the matter of names, has, as you say, saved us endless work. If plunderers haven't obliterated the name and stolen the scarabs and other marks of identification, we generally discover who it is."

Meg sighed. "Is it just ordinary desert and daylight still up above, Freddy? I can't believe it. We seem to be back in the Egypt of the Pharaohs down here."

They all looked silently again at the wonderful sight, far more wonderful than words can suggest—the power of Egypt, the mystery of death.

"The soothsayer was quite true," Meg said. "His words were more than true."

"Yes," Freddy said, "more than true. And the odd thing is that he said what I thought was a lot of rot about a 'bridal figure,' its splendour, its brilliance. He visualized it almost correctly. He said, too, that there would be great trouble for us in the work; he saw difficulties and errors and wrong judgments. Nothing was clear, beyond the brilliance of the figure and the objects. I wonder if he will be right in that as well?"

Michael and Margaret looked at each other. Obviously Freddy had been influenced by the accuracy of the visionary's predictions. His voice was free from scoffing. He owned that it was extraordinary—the manner in which the man's words had come true. Neither Meg nor Michael made any remark; they held their tongues in patience.

"There is certainly plenty of gold," Freddy said, "and jewels and much fine apparel. I hope we shan't encounter the great difficulty he expects, as regards the historical problems and arguments it may open up. He predicts that the opinions of the learned Egyptologists will be cast out; their judgments will be at fault. What at first will appear obvious and clear will not be the lasting truth."

"How odd!" Mike said. "Was he very pleased to hear of the correctness of his predictions so far?"

"I haven't told him."

"Not told him?"

"No, it's wiser not. I've done my best to keep the astonishing richness of the tomb from the ears of the natives. No one has been inside it but the Chief Inspector and the photographer and you two. No words have been spoken—you must not talk."

Meg's heart bounded. It was delightful to be one of the privileged few, to be trusted and accepted as one of the school. She felt like a great explorer who had set foot in untravelled country.

"If we stand here, without moving," she said; "quite, quite still, mayn't we stay for a little bit longer? I'm so full of wonder and amazement, Freddy. I can't begin to think intelligently or see things separately—everything is a blurred mass of white and gold and blue and priceless objects."

"No, Meg, I'm sorry—I can't let you stay. You see, I must take this light with me, and get on with picking up those small objects. You'll see all of them to-night. And without the light you would be in total darkness—real Egyptian darkness."

"That's the thing that beats me. Freddy, how do you solve the problem?—had they electric torches, or were these tombs only built for supernatural eyes to enjoy?"

"They certainly didn't use flares or torches in tombs, as the early Christians did in the Roman catacombs, for there's no trace on the walls of dirt or smoke as there is on the low walls of the catacombs. There is absolutely nothing to tell us how they lighted these vast buildings up, how they even introduced sufficient light to paint them by or to build them. Look at the minuteness of these figures."

"Surely they never built all these wonderful tombs and took the trouble to paint them with the brightest colours if they were never again to be seen with mortal eyes? I can't believe it."

"So far we don't know. Perhaps the *Ka*, the part of a man who lived for ever in his eternal home, had super-

natural powers of sight. The joys were for him. But how did they paint them in the darkness?"

"Is that fact ever alluded to?"

"No, the *Ka* is treated in a perfectly human and natural manner. All his pleasures were material ones. It's very odd—but we'll discover the secret yet."

"If they had some secret form of wireless telegraphy, they may just as well have had some secret means of producing light, don't you think? You've not discovered their wireless code, yet, have you?"

"No, that's still a secret. And they certainly used no apparatus for electric light, if they knew of it. There are no wires in the tombs." He laughed. "You know, there is a lift in the Forum at Rome; it was used for bringing the beasts up to the arena from underground cages. It is in use to-day, I believe."

"We've not discoverd one hundredth part of what they had or hadn't," Meg said. "They probably used radium to cure diseases."

"The Etruscans had dentists who knew the use of gold for stopping teeth—we know that."

"Yes, I've seen a skull with gold-stopped teeth in the Etruscan Museum at Rome."

They had reached the beginning of the steep climb which was to take them up to the open desert. Freddy left them with the assurance that he would come back to lunch. The two policemen were to be responsible for the guarding of the tomb. If anything was disturbed, they would be held to account.

When Margaret and Michael at last reached the open desert, Meg flung herself down and gazed up into the sky. It had never seemed so blue and beautiful before. The clear air rushed into her lungs. Oh, the sweetness and the dearness of the daylight and the real world! The joy it was to press her body close, close to the desert! She put her face down to it. Nothing in all her life had ever been so reassuring and comforting.

Michael was seated beside her. The world was so wide and open and bewildering; he felt giddy, stupefied. Surrounding them was the ever-wonderful light of the desert, the yellow sands and, in the distance, the masses of moving figures, working like busy insects at the clearing away of the tomb-rubbish. Native chants and the noise of picks and spades shovelling up the debris broke the stillness. Life was just as it had been for the last two months. The desert was as it had been before the tribes of Israel followed Moses. Down below them, under the golden sand, in the dark bowels of the earth, Freddy was still picking up precious jewels and packing them into the cigarette-boxes, the effigy of the royal bride still lay in all her Pharaonic splendour. She was there, underneath them, waiting and waiting as she had waited for three thousand years for her heavenly bridegroom. And still by her side lay that shrivelled, withered corpse, the real queen, for whose pride and honour the vast underground temple had been built. The brown mummy was the thing which mattered, the real owner of the costly home.

Freddy, in his white flannels, with his modern mind, was alone with these two forms, alone and shut off from the embracing, loving light of the desert. It was not a quarter of an hour since Meg and he had been there; now they were as far away from the withered mummy and the resplendent bride as though they had travelled across the breadth of the world.

His mind went back to the time before the excavating of the tomb was begun, when it had seemed absurd to suppose that all this splendour lay under their feet. It seemed to him now as though the whole of Egypt might be honeycombed in this subterranean manner.

Meg still lay embracing the sun-warmed sand, rejoicing in the dazzling sunshine.

"It makes one feel very humble," she said at last. "So utterly, utterly unimportant. It doesn't seem as if it much matters what happens, not even to our love, Mike."

Mike raised his face from his hands. "I know," he said. "It is absolute devastation, nothing more or less. I'm shattered, Meg."

"It seems hardly worth while trying to do anything. To-morrow we'll be like that. It's so difficult to explain, except that it's just wiped out my eagerness, it's made our own precious happiness seem absurd and hollow, human beings ridiculous."

"Dearest, I understand, I feel the same," Mike said. "All that down there"—he stuck his stick into the sand—"illustrates a bit too plainly the things we want to forget."

"It shows us the absurdity of what we think are the things that matter. It's really destructive to anything like worldly fame and ambition. Those poor shrunken cheeks, those poor leathery lips, those poor, poor diadems and jewels!"

Mike let her ramble on. It was good for her to give utterance to her incoherent thoughts.

"They are so different when you see them in a museum," she said. "They're impersonal there. They don't hurt one's self-importance."

"In Cairo they belong to a number and a glass case," Mike said. "They lose their individuality."

"Here they are a part of Egypt, that ancient, undying Egypt! You and I, like those dogs, Mike, won't have even bones to record us after three hundred years. Our bowels of tenderness will not lie intact in alabaster jars! Oh, Mike, take me in your arms! I want humanity, I want the things of to-day, I want all which that mummy has ridiculed! I hated it, Mike! I love life and your love! I want to forget that we are here to-day and gone to-morrow, mere human gnats."

Mike held her close to his heart. Meg could hear it beating. Oh, beloved humanity! Oh, dear human flesh and blood!

"That's lovely, Mike—that's you and me! That's our certain human love, our happiness! It is worth while, and

it's not going to be like the running out of an hour-glass while an egg is boiling! It's going to last for ages and ages, isn't it? Say it is, Mike!"

"Yes, beloved." Mike kissed her hands.

She drew them away. "Don't kiss them, Mike. I feel as if they will be dried skeletons by to-morrow, and as if your lips, dearest, will have shrunk and shrunk right back until your teeth gape out of your hideous brown skull up to the blue above. Do you wonder that Akhnaton prayed so ardently that his spirit might come out and see the sun?"

Meg's head was buried in her hands. She was visualizing again the wonderful scene, which had taught her the mockery of all things which had formerly appeared so precious and important. It seemed to her at the moment that to sit down in the desert under the blue sky, and there wait for death, was the only thing to do. Nothing really mattered. Eternity enthralled her. Her happiness with Mike was but the swift hurrying of a white cloud across a summer sky, the work of the Exploration School a mere illustration of worldly vanity. In the great chaos which possessed her soul there was no light to comfort her. In looking into the past she had unexpectedly seen into the future. She had beheld the scorn and callousness of eternity.

Oddly enough, it was Michael who helped her to pull herself together and turn her thoughts to practical things, to the needs of the day. His more mystical nature, his familiarity with the mythology of Egypt and other occult subjects, had in a measure prepared his mind for the things which had burst suddenly upon Meg's practical nature. He had been subconsciously prepared for the tomb to be one of unusual importance. The soothsayer's prediction had not been mere charlatanry to him. His secret thoughts were so constantly focussed on what is termed the superhuman, that Meg's wonder and horror formed only a minor part of his emotions.

A thousand thoughts had flashed through his mind when

he first saw the amazing display of jewels and faience and gold, the resplendent queen, whose royal magnificence had mocked at time. The inexhaustible wealth of buried Egypt forced before his eyes the treasure of gold of which Akhnaton had spoken, that imperial wealth which he had buried behind the hills of his fair capital. He felt convinced that it was there; he felt convinced that his friend in el-Azhar had seen it, just as the Arab soothsayer had seen the royal effigy dressed as a bride.

Mike had little conversation even for Meg. His mind was harassed and absorbed. The fresh impetus which he had received was pounding like a sledge-hammer at his natural and supernatural forces. His natural self was the devil's advocate, and a very able one. It argued against the super-instincts which led him to the treasure. It made him practical. It made him, as Freddy would have declared, "sanely critical of the insane." It admitted the apparent folly of the thing into which he was drifting.

He pulled Meg up from her seat on the sand. He realized that her domestic duties were what her nerves needed; they had lately been greatly taxed, first by her vision of Akhnaton and now by the excitement of their entry into the tomb.[1]

A lover's kisses and strong human arms had done much for Meg. She had a horror of hysterical females. She pulled herself together and determined to be practical.

[1] The description of the interior of this tomb is taken from various reliable accounts of the interior of the tomb of Thiy. As Queen Thiy was the mother of Akhnaton, her tomb must have been discovered before the events described in this story, otherwise they could not have known that Akhnaton's mummy had been found in his mother's tomb.

When the tomb was first examined, the mummy which had fallen out of the coffin was supposed to be that of Queen Thiy. The light of after-events and of scientific research have proved that the mummy was that of a young man of about twenty-five years of age. The conclusion is that Akhnaton's body was brought from his original burying-place near his "City of the Horizon," and placed in his mother's tomb in the Western Hills.

The name of Akhnaton had been erased from the coffin, but it was still readable on the gold ribbons which encircled the body.

Only a few moments before she had felt an almost uncontrollable desire to burst into tears. How thankful she was that Mike had saved her from the humiliation!

But how in the world was she going to bring herself back to the paltry things of every day? How was she ever again going to feel that life was real and actual?

She entered the hut with unwilling feet and troubled mind; for some unaccountable reason its atmosphere depressed her; she wished to avoid it—she felt a curious apprehension of bad news or of coming evil. At the same time, practical work would be beneficial.

As they came in together, Mohammed Ali greeted Michael with the news that "One lady and one gentleman has come, very long time they wait. Lady she stays inside, gentleman he go up the valley."

Instantly life was real again, and Meg a living, angry woman. "She" who stayed inside could only mean Mrs. Mervill. The tomb was forgotten, as was the royal bride. They belonged to the past; the present was all-engrossing.

The present hour was the living reality and Michael, her lover, and her own love were the things that mattered, the woman in the hut the one brilliant vision. Life was vital, urgent. A gnat's life would be long enough if it was to be passed with the woman whom she knew, in the coming struggle, would fight with tools which she, Meg, would not dare or deign to touch. As vivid as her vision of the tomb was her memory of Millicent Mervill's beauty. She could see it illuminating their desert hut; she could feel it eclipsing her own less vivid colouring as the sun had eclipsed the rays of Akhnaton.

Mike looked at her. Meg's cheeks were pale, her eyes deeply shadowed. He hated the woman inside the tent. What had she come for?

A silent kiss separated them. With the kiss Meg's heart took courage. It left no room for fear.

## CHAPTER XIV

When Michael entered the sitting-room of the hut, Millicent Mervill was reading one of Freddy's French novels. There had been plenty of time for her to powder herself and cool down and settle to her liking her dainty person. She looked as fresh and cool and pink as a bough of apple-blossom.

She greeted Michael with a charming mixture of friendliness and discretion. She had brought a friend up the valley, to see all that tourists had to see. He had been put into her hands by a letter of introduction from friends in America. They had seen all that her health would allow her to see, on such a hot day. She had noticed their camp in passing up the valley and could not resist visiting it on her way back. Might she ask for an hour's rest from the sun? Her friend was going to call back for her on the return journey.

"I knew you wouldn't mind," she said. "And I'm not going to stop your work, or bother you."

"I'm not busy," Michael said— "at least, not for the moment." His eyes avoided Millicent's, which seemed to him bluer than usual; but his voice was less cold. His first greeting had been curt and almost impatient. Millicent was evidently wiser and less difficult; she was the same Millicent who had behaved so delightfully at the Pyramids. When she was like that he was glad to be nice to her; he was almost pleased to see her.

As their conversation continued—it was mostly about the tomb and its great importance—a subconscious thought that she had come to the hut for some reason which she was not divulging forced itself more and more strongly on Michael. He became convinced of it; she seemed so unusually contented and satisfied with the plan of confining

her visit to a short rest in the hut and their conversation to "the things of Egyptology," that even Michael was suspicious. She was "*douce comme un lapin blanc*," as she expressed it to herself later on. Her usual insistence had vanished. She treated Michael as a friend, with the proper touch of intimacy. This was when they were alone.

When Margaret came into the room, she hardened. Naturally Margaret invited her to stay for lunch. She was Michael's friend.

"It is always a very light meal with us," she said. "But such as it is, you are welcome to share it."

"Freddy likes his proper meal at night," Michael said.

"Thanks ever so much," Millicent said; she had noticed the coldness of Margaret's voice. "I'd love to stay—that's to say, if it won't really be giving you any trouble—you're looking fagged." She turned to Michael. "What have you been doing with her?" Millicent spoke as if she really cared. "You're too young for such tired eyes, for these lines," she touched Meg's eyes and pulled open the corners. Meg's shrinking gave her satisfaction. "Don't let Egypt ruin your looks, my dear—a woman is only half a woman when her beauty fades; she's only a woman in the eyes of one half of mankind while it lasts."

"Do you think so?" Meg said. "I dare say you're right, but when one is quite young one never stops to consider these things. As you get older, I suppose you do."

The hit went home; the girl had claws.

"We are only as young as we look, are we not? These few weeks have ragged you to pieces."

"I don't mind," said Meg. "It's been well worth it. You may as well get ten years into ten weeks as ten weeks into ten years. I've been gobbling up life, years and years of new experiences and sensations in these last few weeks." Meg meant no more than her words would have conveyed to any sweet-minded woman, but Millicent Mervill put her own interpretation on them. Margaret was no mean fencer; she could hit back as well as parry strokes.

"You've certainly said good-bye to conventions, my dear. I admire you for taking your life into your own hands." The blue eyes searched Margaret's; they spoke of a hundred things which made Margaret long to throw the tumbler which she was placing on the table at her golden head. Margaret was neither ignorant nor a fool; Millicent's eyes explained her meaning.

"One has to say good-bye to conventions in the desert—nothing can be too simple here. That's why Western fashions look so grotesque, our ideas of becoming garments so ludicrous."

Meg had ignored the innuendoes. Her eyes rested on Millicent's absurd shoes and fashionably-cut white serge coat and skirt—a charming suit, but out of place in the hut.

"Is your brother still here?" Millicent asked the question with a beautiful insouciance. She was perfectly well aware that he was personally superintending the excavation of the tomb. Her words were meant to annoy.

"Here?" Meg said. "In the hut at this moment, do you mean? No—he is busy." Meg's eyes flashed with anger.

Michael was silently enjoying the battle of words and eyes which was taking place between the two women. The very atmosphere was charged with antagonism. He was delighted to find that Margaret held her own.

"No—I meant, is he still in the valley, or are you two alone here? How deliciously romantic!" Millicent sighed. The sigh was more suggestive than her words.

"My brother is in the tomb at this moment," Meg said. "You seem to have very extraordinary ideas of the ways of excavators"—she had flushed to the roots of her hair—"of the behaviour of ordinary English people."

"What was the desert made for, but freedom, my dear? If one can't live in this valley as one wants to, where can one, I should like to know?"

"We are living as we like," Meg said. "Your ideas of freedom may not be mine. Our interests lie apart—our

ideas of enjoyment are, as far as I can understand, poles apart."

"A foolish waste of time, my dear, that's all I can say. May I smoke?"

Michael handed her a box of cigarettes; he noticed the exquisite refinement of her hands as she picked out a cigarette, her brightly-polished nails. "Thanks, dear," she said, as she lit the cigarette from the match which he held out to her—the "dear" was for Meg's benefit; for as their eyes met hers were full of genuine fun and mischief.

"I must tease her," she said, in a low whisper; Meg had gone to the end of the room. "I love shocking those dark eyes—I enjoy making her hate me. It's only fun."

Meg's heart was beating. How dared she call Michael "dear"? How dared she intrude herself uninvited upon their simple life? Her beauty, her foolish feminine clothes, angered her. She hated Millicent's fine skin, which was, even in the desert heat, as poreless as a baby's. It was a wonderful skin for a grown person, let alone for a woman of Millicent Mervill's age. Meg thought of the dried mummy's lips. One day that pure soft flesh, which held the tints of a field daisy, would be more revolting to look at if it were unearthed than the skin of the three-thousand-year-old queen. If Meg had possessed a wishing-ring, it would not have taken long to effect the inevitable change. The impudence of the woman maddened her. She knew that she could not, even if she had wished to, behave as she did. Millicent did exactly as she liked, as the impulse of the minute suggested.

Meg wondered how she had passed the time while they were at the tomb. Had she examined any private object in the hut? Had she interviewed the servants? She was quite capable of doing it.

She heard her whisper to Mike. Her own sensitiveness now drove her out of the hut; if she wished to speak in whispers, let them speak. She stood sullenly outside the door.

Why did not some strong man strangle women like Millicent Mervill? Why had not she herself the courage to tell her what she thought of her? Probably Millicent would only smile and show her perfect teeth—they always made Meg furious, because they were even better than her own, and hers were, so she thought, her strongest asset—and say, "Poor girl! You are a little overtired"; or she would say, "You have so much to make you happy, dear, and I have so little. Don't be unkind—I only long for sympathy."

Millicent's moments of self-pity were mean and contemptible and yet they were effective.

The only thing to do was to leave the two alone, to trust Michael and go about her business.

Presently she heard Michael say: "Well, I'll leave you to rest until lunch-time—I can't idle while Freddy is working like a nigger. You'll be all right, I know, with your book and a cigarette."

Margaret slipped round to the back of the hut; she did not want to speak to Michael; she was thankful that he had left Mrs. Mervill, but his voice had been too kind, too nice. Meg did not know what she would have liked him to do, what he could have done otherwise. She only knew that the niceness of his voice annoyed her.

When the overseer's whistle for the workmen to "down picks and spades" sounded and the time was ripe for Freddy to appear, Margaret sauntered off to meet him. When she saw him coming she hurried towards him. How she loved him!

When they met she said, "That cat Mrs. Mervill is here. Oh, Freddy, I hate her!"

Freddy laughed. Millicent Mervill, with her extreme modernity and virile passions, was so far removed from the thought of the tomb, from the brown mummy, whose golden ribbons he had been examining; his sister's annoyance was so utterly unlike her mood of the earlier morning! He had never seen Meg so moved as she had been in the tomb. He

felt a little relieved that a very human and irritating influence had suddenly thrust itself across her path. Meg was getting too enthralled in Egypt. These thoughts flashed through his mind.

"Good old Meg," he said tenderly. "The fighting Lampton's roused, is it?"

"Yes," Meg said. "I am roused. She's so insolent, Freddy."

"What?" he said, stopping her before she got further. "Insolent? to whom?"

"To . . ." Meg hesitated. "To life," she said abruptly. "She says things that I could hit her for saying. Freddy, do squash her!—she suggests something nasty with every word she utters."

"I'll try and flirt with her—won't that do?"

"No, don't, Freddy!" Fear clutched at Meg's heart; the woman in her trembled for her brother. Millicent was so fair, so tempting; Freddy was young and, Meg thought, ignorant of the wiles of women.

"You'd rather I did than Mike?" Freddy's eyes laughed as he watched the blush rise to his sister's cheeks. It made her extraordinarily attractive—indeed, fighting seemed to suit Meg. He pinched her arm; they were close pals, tried chums. "I know your secret, Meg—I've had eyes for other things than the tomb!"

"Do you mind, Freddy?" Meg slipped her arm through her brother's; her eyes shone with happiness.

Freddy pressed her arm close to his side. Meg loved him for it. "If I'd minded I shouldn't have let things go so far, should I? I could have packed you off home."

"You've been a darling, Freddy, and I'm so happy! I never knew anything could be so perfect. I sound silly, don't I?"

"No. Mike's one of the very best, Meg. But you'll have to look after him a bit." Freddy's voice was graver.

"How do you mean, Freddy?" Meg at once thought of Mrs. Mervill. Freddy read her thoughts in her voice.

"I don't mean in that way—rather not! He's as straight as a die. I mean, you'll have to help him to walk on his two legs, Meg—stop him standing on his head, make him practical."

"I love him for it, Freddy."

"But it doesn't pay. We're of this world and we've got to live in this world. Mike's always trying to get beyond it, to get into touch with the other side. It's no good meddling with that sort of thing, it always has a disastrous effect on the human mind and human happiness, which proves to me that we're not intended to know or to get in touch with those who have left us. It's unwise to give up one's thoughts to the supernatural."

"Perhaps it is," Meg said, "but why should we be contented to stand still about all that sort of thing, while we leap ahead in science and material progress and everything else? Mike thinks the true understanding is coming, the darkness we have lived in is passing away."

"He may be right," Freddy said. "But for your happiness, Meg, I wish he'd chuck it. The 'sublime truth' of 'spiritualism' he talks about, and the 'God-ruled world-state'—the one's dangerous to his bodily welfare, the other's the Utopian dream of failures. I don't want you to marry a failure, old girl. I want you to have the sort of life you're fitted for."

"People must be what they are, Freddy, and failure isn't a failure if it's done its bit. Rome wasn't built in a day, or the union of Italy achieved without broken hearts—modern Italy had its failures, its Utopian dreamers, long before Garibaldi's triumphant thousand marched into Rome."

"That's true, only one never wants a failure to be a member of one's own family. I don't want a dreamer for a brother-in-law, Meg—not for your husband."

"The Lamptons always want to come in with the victorious legions," Meg said. They were nearing the hut. "It

seems as if the real victors in life were what we call the failures, the pioneers of truth."

"I'm awfully glad, anyway, Meg. Mike's a lucky chap and you're a lucky girl. You know, I think the world of Mike!"

"We aren't engaged, Freddy."

"Oh, aren't you?" He looked at her with laughing eyes. "What do you call it, then? An understanding? Or are you just 'walking out' like 'Arry and 'Arriet?"

Meg laughed happily. "We love each other—we've not got beyond that yet. I suppose we're just 'walking out.'"

"You've told each other about the loving?" Freddy's kindness was bringing something like tears to Margaret's eyes.

"Yes. Michael didn't mean to—it . . ." she paused.

"Oh, I know! The usual thing. Things seem to be going on all right." He laughed. "It mustn't run too smoothly."

"Don't laugh, Freddy. Michael thought you would think it cheek—he won't allow me to consider myself bound to him." She laughed deliciously. "The dear boy wants me to feel free to change my mind, because he's 'a drifter,' because he thinks he isn't a good enough match for your sister. Your sister, Freddy, comes right above mere Meg."

"I see," Freddy said. "Then I'm not to speak about it yet, am I? Just tell me what you want and I'll do it."

"Not yet, Freddy—not while that odious woman is here, at any rate."

"All right, I'll wait. Only I'd rather like to see her face when I congratulate Mike."

"Ought you to congratulate Mike? I'm your sister—isn't it the other way on? Shouldn't you congratulate me?"

They were close to the door of the hut; Meg lingered.

"He's the luckiest man I know. I wish he had a sister just like you. Of course he's to be congratulated! And now I must go and make myself beautiful." His eyes

smiled their brightest. "I bet you I could cut Mike out with the fair Millicent if I set my mind to it."

In the sunlight Freddy looked irresistible, with his violet eyes, shaded by his thick lashes, his crisp hair, as sunny and as fair as a boy's. Meg knew that he was a much better-looking man than Mike—indeed, he would have been too good-looking if his figure had not been all that it was, if there had been the slightest touch of the feminine about him. There was not. Yet in spite of his good looks and astonishing colouring, Meg was right in her consciousness that for women there was more magnetic attraction in Mike's mobile plainness, in his sensitive, irregular features. When the two men were talking together, the senses and eyes of women would be drawn to the plain man.

During lunch Millicent Mervill was very good. She was interested in hearing about the tomb and, Freddy thought, wonderfully intelligent upon the subject. She was, as he expressed it, as clever as a monkey. What little knowledge she had she used to the utmost advantage, to its extreme limit. All her intellectual goods she displayed in her shop window. She had a telling way of saying, "I am completely ignorant upon this or that subject," suggestive of the fact that she really did know a great deal about many other things. She seldom "gave herself away."

Freddy came to the conclusion that she was so quick that it was quite impossible to discover what she really did or did not know or grasp, and, as he said to Mike afterwards, "What she did not know, she will set about knowing when she gets home. That brain won't rest still under ignorance, or let Meg know what it doesn't know."

The description of the fine effigy of the queen thrilled her; her appetite for details was insatiable. There was plenty to talk about, so conversation did not flag and personal topics were avoided.

Freddy thought that she was nicer than she had ever been before and even prettier. He enjoyed his lunch; it certainly was a change to have a beautiful woman, who was

not his sister, and who did her best to make herself attractive, lunching with them in their desert home. After his tremendous efforts of the last three or four days her presence was pleasing. Even the modern clothes and aggressively-manicured finger-nails gave him healthy sensations. His manhood enjoyed her super-femininity.

The little room palpitated with life, the antagonism of the two women was a thing he could feel. He felt it as surely as he had felt the hot air of the tomb. Freddy enjoyed looking at his sister; her combative mood vitalized her.

Her dark hair, so soft and abundant, looked tempting to touch, after the dragged and matted "something" which clung to the skull of the mummy.

Nothing in the room was intrinsically worth a couple of shillings. The seat on which Michael was sitting had been made out of empty boxes; they had been converted into a very presentable armchair by the ingenuity of Mohammed Ali. Yet the atmosphere of the hut was human and domesticated, the two women sweet and fragrant.

And so it was not difficult for Freddy to respond to his fair guest's pleasant chatter. She made him laugh heartily more than once, and he was ready for a good laugh. He was braced by her quick wit and humorous way of looking at things.

Meg was doing her best to appear happy; she was really getting angrier and angrier every minute with the woman who was so thoroughly enjoying herself; angry because Freddy, like all other men, was being deceived by her, because he was obviously thinking her very excellent company—which she was. He was no doubt already wondering why she, Meg, hated her so whole-heartedly. Freddy had seldom mentioned Millicent to his sister; he had kept his own counsel. The Lamptons were silent men, whose appreciation of women like Millicent never led them astray in the choosing of their wives.

Michael had given Millicent his first vivid impressions of

the tomb in a very "Mik-ish" manner. He described Freddy, strikingly distinguishable in his white flannels, greedily picking up jewels and gold and bits of blue faience and stowing them away into boxes by the light of an electric torch.

"A tomb burglar if ever you saw one! I shall never forget the sight."

"There's lots of work for you, Meg, to-night," Freddy said. "There's an awful lot of things to sort and clean—beautiful things."

"How exciting!" Millicent said. "Can you keep any of the small things? They'd stick to my fingers, I feel sure."

"No," Freddy said. "Not unless you are a thief. They aren't ours—I'm only entrusted with the finding of them."

Millicent made a face of dissatisfaction, as she felt for something which she wore fastened to the long gold chain which was hanging from her neck.

"I wonder if you will pronounce this genuine or a fake? Do you remember, Mike, our buying it?" She ran her fingers along the chain. The genuine antique or fake was not on it; it was missing. She felt again. No; there was nothing on the chain.

"Oh, I've lost it!" she said. "My precious eye of Horus, Mike. I wouldn't have lost it for the world!" Her tone conveyed his understanding of the personal value which she attached to the amulet.

"What was it?" Freddy said. "Can't we get another? If you bought it, it was probably a fake."

"A new one would never be the same—Mike gave me the one I've lost"—she purposely used Michael's intimate name —"while we were staying at Luxor. It has been my 'heaven-sent gift' "—(the ancients' name for the amulet, which represented the right eye of Horus).

They all looked to see if the amulet had been dropped in the room, if it was under the table. But it was nowhere to be found; the eye of Horus was concealing itself.

"It was probably only a fake," Freddy said, "if you

bought it in Luxor. I'll try and get a genuine one for you —for ages and ages they were the commonest of all amulets, judging by the number we find. Almost every ancient Egyptian must have worn one. It was the all-seeing eye, the protecting light."

"The moon was the left eye of Horus and the sun was the right—isn't that so?" Millicent asked.

"Roughly speaking, but the eye of Horus is a complicated subject. It's not just the evil or good eye of Italy, by any means. The eye of Horus is the eye of Heaven, Shakespeare's 'Heaven's eye,' but it's when it gets identified with Ra that the complication comes in. The *sacred* eye is the eye of Heaven, or Ra. Poets, ancient and modern, have sung of it, from the time of Job to the days of Shakespeare. But there was also the evil eye, the one we hear so much about in Southern Italy."

"Tell me about that. I always like the naughty stories. I've never grown up in that respect. The evil eye is more interesting to me than the eye of Heaven. I knew a woman in Italy who was selling lace; she let a friend of mine buy all she wanted from her at the most absurdly cheap prices you can imagine. When the lady of the house we were staying in, who had allowed the woman to call and bring her lace, asked her why she had sold the lace to a stranger at a price for which she had refused to part with it to her, she simply threw up her eyes and said, '*Ma*, Signora, what could I do? She had the evil eye—if I had not given it to her what terrible misfortunes she could have brought to me!'"

"I remember seeing a crowded tramcar in Rome empty itself in a moment when a well-known Prince, who was supposed to have the evil eye, got into it," Michael said.

"A common expression for a woman in ancient Egypt was *stav-ar-ban*, which meant 'she who turns away the evil eye,'" Freddy said.

"Then the Egyptians believed in the evil eye, as apart from the sacred eye of Ra?" Millicent said. "What a uni-

versal belief it seems to have been! One meets with it all over the world."

"Wasn't there a book found in the ancient library of the temple of Dendereh which told all about the turning away of the evil eye?" Mike asked.

"I believe so," Freddy said. "But I've never seen it."

Millicent was still fingering her empty chain. "I feel lost without my eye," she said to Mike, who had answered her persistent gaze. "You bought it for me after that long, long day we spent together in the desert behind Karnak. Do you remember that Coptic convent"—she made a face of disgust—"and the amusement of the nuns at my blue eyes, and all the dreadful dogs? You bought the eye from the old man who looked as if he had lived inside a pyramid all his life." She turned to Margaret. "It was a wonderful day, and we behaved like children in the desert, didn't we, Mike?"

Meg managed to hide her annoyance, but something hurt inside her—probably her bowels of wrath.

"It was a lovely day, I remember. The Coptic convent looked like a collection of beehives huddled together in the desert. You wouldn't go inside it because you were afraid of the fleas, and I wasn't allowed to go in because I was a man."

"I'd had enough of Coptic churches. Have you ever been in the early Christian churches in Cairo?" she asked Margaret.

"No, but I've heard about them."

"Well, I have, and all I can say is that if the early Christians in Rome were as dirty as the survivors of the Church of St. Mark are in Cairo, I don't wonder at the pagans. I wasn't going to risk the monastery after the appalling filth of their churches, dirty pigs!"

At that precise moment Mohammed Ali brought in the coffee. It was served in the native fashion, in small enamelled glass bowels, on a brass tray. When he handed the tray to Mrs. Mervill he pointed to a small object lying beside her cup.

"Lady, I find *antika* all safe."

Millicent's heart beat more quickly; a little deeper rose warmed her cheeks. She picked up the eye of blue faience from the brass tray with well-assumed delight. Margaret's dark eyes were resting on her. She felt them.

"Thank you," she said to Mohammed Ali. "I'm so glad." Her hand shook a little as she lifted her cup. "Heaven's eye is not withdrawn," she said gaily to Michael.

"Where did you find it, Mohammed?" Michael asked the question innocently.

Mohammed Ali's eyes met Mrs. Mervill's. In them he saw the promise of a handsome *baksheesh*.

"When lady get off donkey, chain it catch on the saddle."

A slight sigh escaped from Millicent's lips; Mohammed was worthy of his race.

"Oh, yes! How stupid of me not to remember! I quite forgot that my chain caught as I dismounted. I never thought of looking to see if I had lost anything."

Meg knew that Millicent Mervill was lying and she knew that Mohammed knew that she was lying. She also knew Mohammed well enough to know that if she chose, she could buy him back again from Millicent. Mohammed handled the truth very carelessly; it was still his unshakable policy to secure as much money as he could and give as much pleasure as he could to the person who gave him the most. His Eastern knowledge of human nature told him that Margaret would not be likely to seek to buy his secret. He might, perhaps, tell her the truth when Mrs. Mervill had gone away, because he sincerely liked her, but as far as bribery or corruption was concerned, he must rest content with what Mrs. Mervill thought a sufficient reward for his intelligence and silence.

Margaret had felt pretty certain that Millicent's curiosity had not remained contented with the inspection of the public sitting-room. As she watched her trembling hand and noted the blush on her cheeks, she felt that her suspicions were not unjust. Instinctively her mind flew to her

diary; it was lying on a table in her room. She had kept it very faithfully ever since her arrival in the valley. It was an intensely intimate, human document. It was a record of all her impressions and of her life in the valley, and of every incident which had happened in relation to her friendship with Michael. If Millicent had read any of it, she must have seen into her very soul. Margaret's whole being writhed at the thought of the thing. She had taken the precaution to write it in French so that she could leave the book unlocked in her bed-room. None of the house "boys" could read French; Millicent, of course, both spake and read it fluently.

As Meg thought of this, the cruel laying bare of her inner woman to the woman she hated, a hot blush dyed her cheeks; she felt giddy.

Millicent noticed the blush. Her eyes rested upon Meg's until Meg was compelled to raise hers. Then the two women looked into each other's souls. Their unspoken thoughts were plainly read by each other.

It was Millicent who triumphed. No shame made her eyes drop; no fear weakened their challenge. They boldly said, "You see, I know, I have learnt. You are not all that you look. I have discovered the other woman."

With extraordinary clearness Margaret visualized Millicent's delicate fingers turning over the pages of her diary. She could see her eyes gloating over its secret passages. She could feel Millicent's beautiful presence filling her plain little bed-room, which would never be the same again. Her delicate fragrance which was no stronger than the subtle perfume of English wild flowers, was probably lingering in it still. Meg felt herself clumsily big and masculine beside her, for Millicent never allowed you to forget that, above all things, she was a woman, that in her companionship with men she was not of the same sex.

When the eye of Horus was once more, with Freddy's assistance, securely fastened on to the gold chain, and the

coffee had been drunk and cigarettes were being indulged in, Mrs. Mervill's American friend appeared at the hut.

He was a very agreeable and cultured man. His chief interest in things Egyptian was centred in the subject of ancient festivals. When he was smoking with the party, a really interesting discussion took place between the three men. Mr. Harben, the newcomer, had been particularly interested in the "intoxication festivals" held in honour of the goddess Hathor at Dendereh.

Michael naturally had read more upon the subject of the festival of Isis. At her festival the "Songs of Isis" were sung in the temples of Osiris by two virgins. These festivals were held for five days at the sowing season every year. These "songs of Isis," of course, related to the destruction of Osiris by Set and the eventual reconstruction of his body by his wife Isis and her sister goddess Nephthys. In other words, it was the festival of the triumph of light over darkness, the power of righteousness over evil, the oldest of all battles.

During the discussion Millicent Mervill was at her best. She was intellectually curious and excitable. The festival of Isis bored her; she did not care for or believe in the inevitable triumph of light over darkness. With her evil flourished like a green bay-tree, while righteousness was its own reward—and a very dull one. She was religious—after the conventional fashion of the people with whom she consorted; she enjoyed going to a church where there was good music or an audacious preacher to be heard. But she never wanted to be better than she was; her wants were for the further satisfaction of her material enjoyments on this earth.

But the Bacchanalian festivals of Hathor had interested her and aroused her curiosity, from the very first time that she had seen the figures of the dancing-girls, so realistically carved on the walls of the temple of Dendereh. She had read all that she could lay her hands on relating to the subject, which consisted only of such portions of the

papyrus as the translators have seen fit to give to the general public. Her American friend had gone further. He was not only interested in the Bacchanalian dances, but in Egyptian festivals generally.

Both Margaret and Millicent became silent as the discussion proceeded and for the time being their animosity was forgotten; they found themselves for once sympathetic listeners and good companions. Michael was pleased.

As the discussion gradually soared above their understanding, they talked of things between themselves.

Time flew pleasantly, so much so that Margaret felt a little regret when at last Millicent and her friend said good-bye. She had almost forgotten her ugly suspicions about Millicent, who had been very charming and simple. She wished that she had not spoken so hastily to Freddy about her. Her conscience pricked her.

Later on, as the trio, Michael, Freddy, and Margaret, watched their two guests depart, very different thoughts filled their minds. Michael was hoping that a new phase in the acquaintance between the two women had begun, that Meg would now hold out a helping hand of sympathy to Millicent. Meg was wondering if Freddy thought that she had been unjust and horrid, just because Millicent was beautiful and a cleverer woman than herself. Freddy had obviously enjoyed her unexpected visit.

"Your fair friend paid us this honour, Mike, for some reason best known to herself," he said. "Some reason she has not divulged. I wonder what it was? There is always a hidden reason in what she does."

"Curiosity," said Michael, carelessly. "She wanted to see how excavators live and to find out for herself what we were doing."

"I guess so!" Freddy said, significantly. "Find out for herself—that was just it." He laughed. "I wonder how much she did find out?" Freddy clapped his hand on Mike's shoulder as he spoke. "I didn't give you away, old chap!"

Michael faced him squarely. So Freddy knew?

"Has Meg told you?" His voice was anxious.

"Told me? Do you suppose I'm blind?" Freddy spoke with such frank sympathy and pleasure that from his voice more than his words Michael took heart.

"It's awful cheek on my part."

"Yes, 'awful cheek,' " Freddy said. "Considering Meg's just the one and only Meg in the world." He took Meg's brown hand in his—such a different hand from Millicent's!—and placed it on the top of Michael's and held it there. "Bless you, my children!" he said. "I feel like a heavy father. And I've nothing more to say, except that I'm jolly glad, and I congratulate you both."

Meg's eyes were shining. Freddy was so boyish and yet so much her elder brother. How she loved him!

"Thanks, old chap," Michael said. "I suppose Meg's told you all about it?—I mean, how I'm not going to let her bind herself to me? We love each other, and I forgot and told her I did."

Freddy laughed. "If something better than you, you old drifter, turns up, she's to be free to take him. Of course, something will!"

"Yes," Michael said. Or if . . ." he paused.

"If you prove too unpractical for a husband, you old humbug, I'm to cancel the engagement!"

Meg linked her arm in her brother's. "I'm quite practical enough for us both," she said. "The Lampton common sense wants leavening. We never rise to heights, Freddy—we're solid dough."

"We manage to get down into the bowels of the earth, which helps a bit, if we can't soar very high."

All three laughed. Freddy meant the tomb, of course.

Freddy was smoking a cigarette. His eyes were following the two donkeys which were taking Millicent and her friend down the valley. They looked like white insects in the distance; they had travelled rapidly, as donkeys will travel on their homeward journey.

"The fair Millicent!—and, by Jove, she is fair!"—Freddy said, meditatively, "didn't come here to find out your engagement—don't imagine so. She managed to carry away some information more difficult to obtain than that." He laughed and quoted the old saying, "Love, like light, cannot be hid. What a pity she isn't all as nice as the nice parts of her, or as nice as she is pretty!"

"I always think she looks so nice to eat," Margaret said.

"I think she looks so nice to kiss," Freddy said laughingly. "If that American hadn't been there, I'd have taken her off for a walk, and then I could have told you, Mike, what it was like."

Meg blushed to the roots of her hair. Her brother's words recalled the ball at Assuan. She knew that Michael knew what it was like.

Freddy saw Meg's blush and wondered what it meant. He turned and left the lovers to enjoy a few moments' uninterrupted bliss and to discuss the day's events.

Their bliss consisted in standing together, silently watching the two figures on the white donkeys disappear into the valley below. When the last trace of them had vanished and the desert and the sky composed their world, Meg gave a sigh of relief. Perfect content was expressed in her attitude and silence, a long silence, too sacred to be broken rashly. The sun was brilliant, the distance before them immense, compelling.

As Meg gazed and gazed, her heart became more and more full of happiness. The world was a wonderful mother; she had only to trust, to believe, to love, to have happiness showered upon her.

"In a book I was reading the other day, Mike," she said, "the heroine remarked that looking into a great distance always made her long to be better than she was. How true it is—at least, with me. I knew what she meant, instantly. I feel it now, don't you?"

"That's why town-life is so bad for us," he said. "Our vision never gets beyond the traffic, beyond the progress of

commerce. I've often thought the same thing. Distances are sublime."

"The distances in the desert make me feel far more like that than any other distances. The desert has taught me so much—it is a wonderful mother."

Michael's eyes answered her.

"Looking at that distance makes me wish I hadn't been so wicked in my heart about Mrs. Mervill. I was bursting with hate of her, Mike—I longed to hurt her as she always hurts me!"

"You behaved splendidly! I knew it was an awful trial to you. You knew I understood, Meg?"

"It was a trial," Meg said, "but why am I so little when I am put to the test, and why do I feel so big, so far above such contemptible things, when I look at a distance like that?"

"Because you're a darling, human woman, Meg." Michael's arms went round her. "Because there would be no merit in our victories if the battles were quite easy."

"I suppose not, but for your belief in me, Mike, I want to be as big as the biggest thoughts I've got, and I'm only as small as my meanest."

"You are the mistress of my happiness, Meg."

Meg's eyes shone with understanding, while his words called up the figure and the bright rays of Akhnaton.

"Freddy said that I am to act as a curb on your unpractical tendencies, Mike. I felt very deceitful. He doesn't know how much I've aided and abetted them."

"He never imagined that he'd a practical mystic for a sister, did he?"

"Never," Meg said.

"But that's what you are, dearest—a practical mystic. You are a woman with two sides to your nature—the intensely practical and the subconsciously mystic. Egypt has developed the mystic half—your Lampton forbears are responsible for the other."

"The Lampton half of me keeps my two feet firmly planted on the earth, Mike."

"The mystic half loves this silly drifter." He pressed her to him.

"The practical half says, come back to the hut and help Freddy."

And so they went.

## *PART II*

## CHAPTER I

MICHAEL'S travels in the Eastern desert had barely extended over a three days' journey by camel and some hours spent on the Egyptian State Railway, which runs by the banks of the Nile.

The town of Luxor lies on the right or east bank of the Nile, four hundred and fifty miles to the south of Cairo. Tel-el-Amarna, or "The City of the Horizon," Akhnaton's capital, lies about a hundred and sixty miles south of Cairo. Michael could very easily have gone almost all the way to the modern station of Tel-el-Amarna, or Haggi Kandil, by boat or by train from Luxor, which faces the Theban Hills, in whose bowels lies the great Theban necropolis, the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings, which had been his home for some months. But that was not his idea; he wished to spend all his days in the solitude of the desert, so he started his journey at a point halfway between Luxor and Tel-el-Amarna.

This was not his first pilgrimage to the Eastern desert.

Luxor and Assuan both lie on the east bank of the Nile; the great Arabian Desert in Egypt stretches from the Suez Canal to Assuan; after Assuan it is called the Nubian Desert. The Libyan Desert stretches from Cairo to Assuan, but on the western bank of the Nile. Michael's desire was for the uninterrupted ocean of sand which stretches from

the shores of the Atlantic to the cliffs which give the Nile its sunsets. Its infinity of space drew him to it.

In the desert, where a traveller begins his day at dawn and ends it at sundown, where the slow tread of his camel is only interrupted by a short halt for the midday meal, and the days roll on and into each other as the sand-dunes roll on and into succeeding sand-dunes, the sense of hours and days becomes lost. With nothing in front of the eye but an infinity of sky and distance and nothing active in that distance but dazzling heat, moving over the desert, the mind becomes a part of the intense solitude. The traveller's *ego* is comatized; he takes his place with the elements.

When the traveller's long day's march is done, the wonder of the starlit nights makes his past life seem still more unreal. It has been truly said that the solitary contemplation of the desert stars either for ever convinces a doubter of the certainty of a God, or confirms his opinions as an Atheist. When Michael was alone with the stars, the Sweet Singer of Israel's words ever rang in his ears:

"When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained;

"What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?"

During the three days spent on camel-back in the desert nothing had happened which the world calls happening. Michael's small equipment was proving itself entirely satisfactory and sufficient for his needs. His guide and his servants were both agreeable and obedient. His head-man or guide was none other than the soothsayer who had predicted the astonishing wealth of the tomb which Freddy had discovered. He had travelled far and wide in the great Arabian Desert and he had also helped at the excavations at Tel-el-Amarna.

Although apparently nothing had happened, no events which would bear recording in the diary of a practical ex-

plorer, yet much had happened which evaded the limitations of words. The things which had happened were the great things which mattered to Michael's mind. They had produced an extraordinary sense of repose; they had settled his nerves and allowed his convictions to steadily develop, to emerge from shadowy dreams. If he thought less constantly of Margaret as the days wore on, it was with more satisfaction and confidence. He ceased to blame himself for confessing his love; he accepted that also as an act of the guiding Hand.

On the desert march Michael generally went at the head of his cavalcade. He liked the wide sweep for the eye, the great expanse, undisturbed, even by such picturesque figures as the natives on their camels. Over and over again he rode for hours in a beautiful dream; he gave himself up to the intoxication of immensity. At such times the thought would come to him that if he turned the universe upside-down, nothing would happen. The high heavens would be made of golden sand and the limitless earth of bright blue —that would be all the difference; nothing would tumble about, for there was nothing to tumble; nothing would be standing on its head, for there was nothing which had a head to stand on. God's world was as it had been before the creation of man.

Since his *Hijrah*, as Freddy called his flight from the valley, he had ceased to think about his own standing on his head. He had accepted the fact that a man must work out his own life as truly as he must work out his own salvation. To be a weak copy of Freddy would be contemptible; it would be better to be an out-and-out failure and drifter for the rest of his days. As a failure he would at least be living the life he best understood, the life which to him seemed fuller than the lives lived by successful materialists.

For the whole three days in the desert he had scarcely passed a living creature; it was the most desolate journey he had ever taken. Some portions of the great desert are

much more barren than others, more extraordinarily desolate. The whole thing, of course, depends upon the all-important water. One writer's words explain the matter concisely—"there are two kinds of desert in Egypt, the desert of sand, which is only desert because it is left without water, and the desert which is desert because nothing profitable will grow there."

Probably the country over which Michael had travelled belonged to the last type of desert. There had been wonderful effects of light and shade and strange changes in the colour of the sand and rocks, owing to geological reasons. Sometimes such strange effects that he found it hard to believe, from a distance, that there were not bright carpets or gay flowers spread on the sands.

To the uninitiated it sounds as if such a journey could become dangerously monotonous and boring, and so it would to the eye or mind which has not the true desert instinct. Michael's had it. He loved its passionate intensity of sky and space as a true sailor loves the ocean. He loved his "ship of the desert," which bore him silently over the rolling waves of sand, as a Jack Tar loves his ship. He loved the stories of the desert which his guide told him at night under the southern stars, as an English Jack Tar loves his fo'c'sle yarns.

Although nothing ever happened, there was for Michael something happening every minute, some fresh beauty which revealed a new phase of Nature, some geological surprise which changed the colour and atmospheric effect of his surroundings. At one time mirage after mirage appeared and disappeared like delicate, subtle dreams; fair cities sprang up on the horizon with white-winged sailing-boats drifting on their waters; tall palm-trees, black against the light, stood up and refreshed the eye, only to become fainter and fainter until they were no more.

These fair Jerusalems, God's help to tired travellers, with eyes grown weary of emptiness and space, made beautiful interludes in the day's march. Since their first day's

march they had seen no real desert villages, with their much-treasured palm-trees and picturesque inhabitants, for they had made for the open desert. Where palm-trees grow, there are also human habitations and Government taxes. Anything green in the desert which is of lasting duration is the result of artificial irrigation. But if the sand brings forth no food for man or beast, its emptiness holds a world of prayers and desires.

. . . . . .

It was about noon of the fourth day of Michael's journey when he saw in the distance a cavalcade of camels riding towards him. It had emerged out of nothing; suddenly it became clearer and clearer. Was it mirage? It was still so distant that it might yet prove an optical delusion.

He stopped his camel. Abdul, seeing that his master evidently wanted something, rode forward quickly.

"Look, Abdul," Michael said, "can you see some camels coming towards us?"

Abdul had no need to look. His eyes could see much further than Michael's. He had already noticed the cavalcade.

"*Aiwah, Effendi,* they are camels carrying real human beings." His master's words had implied that he wondered if he was looking at a mirage. Michael had never seen a mirage of anything but scenery, villages with minarets and rivers with boats—reflections, in fact, of distant towns.

Abdul assured his master that the camels were real camels and that he was almost certain that it was an European outfit; it did not belong to desert natives.

Michael again rode on ahead for a few moments. He wondered where the travellers were coming from, and whither they were bound. This fourth morning's journey had certainly brought them slightly nearer again to the border of civilization. He knew that they were skirting an ancient oasis. Perhaps the travellers had come from it. He was still some distance from Tel-el-Amarna—not the

of his camel; its somnolent tread had lulled his senses like the gentle movement of an ocean steamer on the high seas.

As the two cavalcades drew nearer to each other, Abdul pressed forward to his master's side. His long sight, well used to desert distances, had clearly discerned what to Michael was still indistinct, blurred by the sun.

"One lady in party, Effendi."

Michael showed surprise. It was an extremely unlikely place to meet a lady on camel-back; there were no tourists in that part of the desert, so far back from the Nile; it was not a likely place to meet an European pleasure-party. Michael knew that Abdul had meant an European lady when he spoke of "one lady" being in the party; he would not have mentioned the fact if it had been only a Bedouin Arab woman moving her home to some more desirable spot. Perhaps it was some excavation-party. A number of European women, he knew, were now engaged on archæological work in Egypt.

As the distance shortened, he began to count the number of the camels. It was not a large equipment.

Quite suddenly the two leading camels of the approaching party strode forward, almost at a gallop, the curious gallop of fast-travelling desert camels. The next minute a clear voice called out:

"Hallo, good morning! Have you used Pears' Soap?"

Michael's heart stopped beating. It was Millicent's voice. For the sake of appearances he returned her greeting gaily, although his heart was filled with anger.

"No," he cried back. "But I've used desert sand, which the Prophet said does as well."

Millicent had tricked him, cheated him. She had discovered his plans; she had laid hers very cleverly so as to meet him on the most desolate part of his journey. A vision of Margaret's anger, had she seen her riding towards him, rose before his eyes. The tone of Michael's voice expressed something of his feelings; it made Millicent all the more daring.

"I arranged a surprise for you—wasn't it clever?"

"It is certainly a surprise," Michael said. "Where are you going?"

"Whither thou goest, I will go," she said laughingly. "Where do you suppose I am going?"

"This is absurd, Millicent!" Michael lowered his voice.

"Why absurd? The desert's big enough for us both, isn't it?"

"I should have thought it sufficiently big to have made our meeting unnecessary."

"Now, Mike, don't be an ungracious pig! Here I am and here I mean to stay. I won't bother you, so just be nice."

The mules and camels of both parties had met. The men had joined forces and much talking was going on amongst the natives.

"Have you come alone?" Michael asked.

"My dragoman is with me."

"Of course," Mike said. "I know that. But are you by yourself, without any other European?"

"Quite," Millicent said. "I didn't want anyone. Hassan's a reliable dragoman. I came to meet you."

"Do you think it was nice of you?"

"Well, no," she said. "Perhaps not, but it is nice *for* me, Mike, and it will be nice for you, too, if you will only be sensible and accept the situation."

"What do you mean by being sensible?" he asked.

"Just allowing me to come, and being pleasant and happy and enjoying yourself. I've everything I need—I won't ask you for a single thing but happiness."

"I shan't be happy—I wished to be alone. You knew it."

"What harm shall I do? I'll halt when you halt, I'll go on when you go on. I'll be *douce comme un lapin blanc* —I really can be, Mike." Her eyes asked him if in that respect she was not speaking the truth.

"Yes," he said. "You can be anything you want to be."

He sighed. "I wish you oftener wanted to be good, Millicent; I wish you oftener wanted to please me and not always only yourself."

"I'd get nothing if I did, Mike. I stole this march on you, half for fun and half because it's no use trusting to you. I never see you—you are afraid of yourself."

"I told you it was useless." He moved his camel further from hers. "I must see what is to be done. You must turn back. Your very presence disturbs all my ideas."

"The natives think this is a prearranged plan, of course. They give you the benefit of being more human than you are."

Michael looked at her in annoyance. He knew that she was right; he knew that even Abdul, the visionary, would not believe him if he told him otherwise; he knew that already he had formed his own opinion of Michael's surprise.

Millicent's veil almost completely hid her face. She flung it up over her sun-hat. As Abdul came to his master's side, Michael saw his eyes linger on the Englishwoman's beauty. He knew that to the Eastern, mixture of mystic and fanatic as he was, her freshness and fairness were like the scent of white jasmine to his nostrils.

This woman, who loved his master—for already Millicent's dragoman had confided her secret to him—was very rarely beautiful, and in his eyes very desirable; but she was false. His eyes had instantly seen beyond. Because she was false she interested him. She was not like other Englishwomen; she was not like the girl who was the sister of Effendi Lampton. This wealthy Englishwoman, whose body was as sweet as a branch of scented almond-blossom, had thoughts in her heart like the thoughts of his own countrywomen. In his Eastern mind, Englishwomen retained their virgin minds and ideas even when they were married women with families; to their end they retained the hearts and minds of innocent children. This slender creature, a sweet bundle for a man's arms, thought as his

countrywomen thought. He saw into her mind as he had seen into the unopened tomb.

He was amazed at the Effendi, not because of this meeting with his mistress—it was not an unheard-of thing in the desert; he was not accustomed to the ways of men and women of all nations when their passions control their actions—he was amazed at his own false impression of Effendi Amory's character and mind. He had never for one moment contemplated such a *contretemps*; he would never have imagined that he could be false to Effendi Lampton's sister. The meeting, however, lent a double interest to their journey.

"The Effendi has been fortunate in meeting his friend," he said respectfully. Michael had turned to address him.

"Yes," Michael said. "We have been fortunate." He saw no other way of settling the question. For the present he must quietly accept the inevitable. Millicent had insisted that she had a perfect right to follow him, even if he refused to allow her to join his party.

"We will go on, Effendi? The *Sitt* will accompany us?" Abdul's voice was expressionless, deferential.

"For to-day, at least," Michael said, "the *Sitt* will travel with us." He knew that equivocation was useless.

Abdul searched his master's eyes. There was no love in them, no passion for the woman he had taken all this trouble and secrecy to meet. Englishmen were strange beings. Time would prove which way the wind of desire blew. Was it from the woman to the man or from the man to the woman? Had Michael the qualities of Orientals for dissembling his feelings? It was rare amongst Europeans.

The cavalcade moved on. A fresh element had been introduced into it. The at-all-times low talk of the natives soon became more obscene than it is possible for Western minds to imagine. Its influence affected the sublime silence of the desert. God no longer shadowed the distance.

Michael knew the native mind. He had heard the workmen at the excavation camp, and even the girls and women

in the desert villages, discussing subjects freely and openly which to the Western mind are impossible. He had heard children and boys using language and ejaculations which would disgrace the lips of the most degraded Western.

Before Millicent's appearance his men had no doubt talked together in a way which would have shocked a stranger to the East if he could have understood what they were saying, but there had been an absence of any special topic; their talk had been impersonal. Now their interests were awakened, their lowest instincts were on the alert, their passion for intrigue whetted. Suggestion, like perseverance, can work miracles. With Millicent riding by his side and with the whole company of servants discussing their affairs, the desert had lost its purity, its healing powers. In its sands the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil seemed to need no water.

Michael clung to the thought of Margaret. For some few moments they rode in silence. Michael was inarticulate; his thoughts were like a flaming bush. In half an hour's time they would halt for lunch; until that time Millicent held her soul in patience.

Nothing was to be gained by a broken conversation on camel-back. A delicious excitement exalted her; her plans had succeeded; the very devil of insolence danced in her veins. She had trapped Michael and successfully outwitted Margaret Lampton. She was going to thoroughly enjoy herself. Michael, of course, would become quite docile in her hands later on; one of her gentle spells would reconcile him.

"How long have you been in the desert?" Michael asked.

"We've camped for two nights," she said. "It's been perfectly beautiful! We have had no difficulties, no adventures and we've scarcely met a living soul. This eastern desert is awfully desolate, Mike—you're alone with your thoughts if you can't speak to your dragoman."

"It's very desolate," Mike said. "And it's quite different

from the Valley in colour and in feeling—at least it is to me."

"I think so, too. This morning we met a strange creature—the only human we've struck—one of those desert fanatics, 'a child of God,' as my dragoman called him."

Michael's heart beat faster; he forgot his annoyance. "Where did you meet him?" he asked.

Millicent noticed the change in his voice. "Not long before we sighted you. He was travelling this way—we shall probably pass him. Our camels were travelling at a good pace."

"Did you speak to him?"

"No, I couldn't, but Hassan did. I asked him about him. He told me that what we call an idiot or a village simple is really a man whose reasoning powers are in heaven. We see the material part of him, the part that mixes with ordinary mortals. To the Mohammedans such people are considered sacred, special favourites of God."

"Yes, I know," Michael said, "and the worst of it is that advantage is taken of that charming idea and dreadful things are done by rogues who pretend to be religious fanatics or holy men. Some of them are awful creatures, absolute impostors, but as a rule they frequent towns and cities. The genuine holy man, a 'child of God,' lives apart from his fellows in the desert."

"This poor creature wore a long cloak made out of all sorts of bits, a weird Joseph's coat of many colours. His tall staff was hanging with tattered rags and his poor turban was in the last stages of decay." Millicent's voice betokened genuine pity. "He looked terribly thin and tired. I ought to have given him some food—he wouldn't accept money. I don't think he grasped its meaning."

Michael's thoughts were busy. "A little child will lead you, do not despise the favoured of God—their wealth is laid up for them in heaven."

And so they journeyed on, Millicent pleased at the result of her conversation. It had set Michael dreaming.

"They have lots of beautiful ideas," she said. She meant Moslems generally, not only the simples or religious fanatics.

"Yes," Michael said. "No religion has more lofty or beautiful ideas and ideals."

"You don't think their ideas are often put into practice?"

"I don't know," Michael said. "It isn't fair to judge—the Western mind can't. Their ideas are beautiful and in obeying the laws laid down by the Koran they do beautiful and kindly acts; at the same time, their minds to us seem terribly polluted. Their religion doesn't appear to elevate their general aims or thoughts of life."

"But isn't it the same with the greater portion of Christians, with many of what we call religious people?" Millicent laughed. "I know it is with myself, Mike. I go to church and say my prayers and I think I believe in all the tenets of the Church and in the Bible—at least, I'd be frightened to *not* believe—and yet it doesn't make me feel a bit better. I don't really want to be good. I want to eat my cake on this earth and have it in heaven as well. All the nicest plums with you, Mike!"

Michael laughed. Millicent was always so frank upon the subject of her own worthlessness.

"We don't know what these people would be like if they had no Koran to curb them," Millicent said. "It may do more than you think. It's a strong bearing-rein."

"That's true. The Egyptians are, I suppose, about the most sensual of all Easterns—the women are considered so, at any rate, by Lane, and he knows them intimately."

Millicent laughed. "I'm sure they are, speaking generally—that's to say, I suppose you meet exceptions here and there, as in all other countries."

"The Prophet had his work cut out," Michael said. "And the world doesn't give him half the credit he deserves. The rules he laid down in the Koran are the only laws a Moslem really observes or reverences. His own soul teaches him nothing; it has been buried far too long by the laws imposed upon it; his superman is non-existent. The natural

man blindly obeys the Prophet's teachings in the hope of the material rewards which will be his when he dies. The future life has always meant a great deal to the Egyptian peoples; their existence on earth has since time immemorial only been looked upon as an apprenticeship for the fuller existence. The very fact that their earthly homes, even the Pharaoh's palaces, were only built of sun-baked bricks made of mud, shows that they carried out in practice the saying in the Bible about having no abiding cities here. Their tombs were their lasting cities and *they* were built to endure throughout all eternity."

"Anyhow, they are delightfully picturesque people in their devotions," Millicent said. "I feel almost as pious when I watch a Moslem praying before sunset as I do when a boy's voice is reaching up to heaven in one of our Gothic cathedrals at home. I think I'm at my best then, Mike, only no one is ever present to test me."

Michael knew exactly what Millicent meant. The emotional side of religion excited her senses. She imagined, when she was listening to a boy's treble soaring up into the lofty heights of an English minster, that her soul was soaring with it, that she was deriving spiritual benefit from the service. He could picture her kneeling with folded hands, the polished nails conspicuously bright, and eyes upraised, listening to the boy's clear, pure voice, her whole being in a satisfied sensuous ecstasy.

He knew that this state of ecstasy was about as far as Millicent's religion ever carried her. She was afraid to give up the flesh-pots of this world in case she found life without them too dull to be supportable. She enjoyed her state of being so thoroughly that she had no wish to change it. Her religion and church-going were, she considered, sufficient to ensure her a place in heaven. It was her way of paying her future-life insurance policy, as were her many liberal gifts to charities.

When the halt for lunch came, Michael and Millicent were to all outward appearance good friends. Michael had

been considering within himself what attitude he ought to adopt towards her amazing adventure, what face he should try to put upon their meeting. His knowledge of the East told him that it was probably best to leave things alone, for whatever he said Hassan and Abdul would put their own construction on the affair. During their conversation, which had been carried on without the slightest regard for Michael's annoyance at her appearance, his thoughts had been very busy. Their serious talk must come later on, when they halted for lunch.

Among the many things which troubled him, Michael tried to solve the riddle of how Millicent had gained her knowledge of his movements. Freddy's words had come back to him—that the fair Millicent had not come to their camp to learn of his engagement to Margaret! She had come to find out something which was more difficult to discover. Had she seen the servants in the hut and questioned them when she was alone there? Had she bribed Mohammed Ali? How otherwise had she found out all that she wanted to know?

When lunch-time came, Millicent's splendid basket, exquisitely furnished and equipped with everything that could be desired for an appetizing and original lunch, was opened, instead of Michael's, which contained the simple necessities of a desert outfit. They chose their halting place under the shadow of a mighty rock—they were reaching hilly ground. Millicent's outfit included a sun-shelter, which was quickly raised and in incredible shortness of time they were comfortably seated under it, on camp chairs at a camp table. Michael could not help showing his pleasure and admiring the dainty equipment. His child's heart was very easily touched and pleased. Nothing was left undone which could be done to give freshness and daintiness to the scene. A luscious fruit salad looked cool and tempting in a glass bowl, while iced drinks, which had been carried in ingenious Eastern water-coolers, appealed to parched lips. The galantine of chicken and the selection of *hors d'œuvre* would

not have disgraced the table of the Cataract Hotel at Assuan. Here, indeed, were the flesh-pots of Egypt—*la tentation de Saint Antoine.*

Millicent noticed Michael's pleasure. It was expressive of his simple, open nature. In such moments he was very lovable.

"Now, isn't this nicer," she said, "than pigging it alone?"

"It's beautiful," he said. "What a wonderful outfit! How clever of you—I feel as if you had a magic wand."

"Hassan's a good man—I left everything to him."

"He's done it A1," Michael said, more coldly. Suddenly he felt annoyed, vexed with himself, for yielding so easily to the pleasures which Millicent had provided, anticipating the enjoyment he would derive from eating all the good things.

After three days' hard travelling in the desert and some days spent in economical living in Luxor, while his arrangements were being made, he was readier than he imagined for a good and delicately-appointed meal. Even at the hut he had never sat down to a lunch such as this. The renaissance of the old Adam astonished him.

The servants had betaken themselves to a sheltered spot; discretion being nine-tenths of a good dragoman's training, Hassan and Abdul saw to it that their master and mistress should not be disturbed, while they themselves remained out of sight, but within call.

"Let's sit down," Millicent said. "I'm starving—the desert turns me into an absolute primitive."

They sat down and while Millicent rid herself of her gloves and sun-hat and veil, Michael remained lost in thought. How nice it was! As nice as anything could be, if . . . the "if" was subconscious . . . if he had only come on this journey into the desert to enjoy himself, if there was no Margaret. But there was a Margaret, and he adored Margaret, whose dear dark head and trustful eyes were ever present with him; they were as present in the

shelter as the golden head and the inviting, provoking eyes opposite to him. There never again would be for him a world which held no Margaret, nor could he endure it if there was. And yet her very existence robbed this desert feast of its flavour. He knew that to be loyal and true to Margaret he ought not to be accepting and appreciating the dainty lunch laid before him. He ought not to be eating it with the woman Meg detested.

What if Margaret knew? What if his practical mystic had already had a vision of their meeting? Had some native carried Millicent's plans to meet him to the Valley? Had the birds of the air brought the news to Freddy's ears? Was Margaret now tortured by a vision of this sumptuous desert picnic? Could she see him sitting alone with Millicent in her tent? He knew how mysteriously news travels in the desert, how quickly it journeys. A wave of anger flushed his face as he pictured to himself what Freddy would think of the situation.

His hands trembled as he took Millicent's dust-cloak and hat. She looked extremely pretty in her white muslin dress, which the cloak had hidden. Millicent mistook the meaning of his trembling hands. She had seen men's hands tremble many times.

"Our little home," she said, as she sat down at the table. "My desert dream realized. I'm so happy!"

"Why did you do it?" Michael cried passionately.

Millicent still mistook the nature of his emotion. She leaned across the table. "Don't ask, dearest—just rest and be content. Hand me the sardines, like a dear man."

Michael handed her the sardines. How could he just rest and be content? If he did, he would allow himself to drift into the woman's mood, he would be enjoying himself at the cost of his loyalty to Margaret. He would be drowning "the clear voice" with Moselle cup and smothering it with galantine of chicken and pigeon-pie.

"I want you to promise me," Millicent said, "just to eat this one meal happily with me, eat and forget. For half

an hour or more don't ask me any questions and don't scold!" She handed Michael an olive in her fingers. "Open," she said. "They're so good."

Michael opened his mouth, but he took the olive from her fingers into his own.

"Will you do what I ask?" she said. "If you will, I'll promise to listen to you afterwards. Your conscience is an awful bore, Michael."

"I'm an awful bore apart from my conscience. It's simply your impish persistence that makes you desire my society. It can't be anything else."

"Perhaps it is," Millicent said. "All the same, will you promise?"

"Very well," Michael said. "That's a bargain. I promise."

"For this one meal you'll be like you used to be?"

"What was that?" he asked. Her words annoyed him.

"Mine," she said. "Mine and not Margaret Lampton's."

Michael put down his knife and fork and looked straight into the eyes of the woman opposite him.

"I am Margaret Lampton's," he said, "and you'd better know it. I'm Margaret Lampton's, body and soul." He flung her hand away.

Millicent gave a suggestive whistle. "Wh-o-o!" she said, with a low laugh. "So that's it?"

"What do you mean?" he said.

"Nothing—I didn't say anything, did I? Oh, don't let's quarrel—let's enjoy our lunch."

"Very well," he said. "Let's, for time's flying. But it's best for you to know that I'm Margaret's."

"Never mind—lend yourself to me for a few days. Surely she won't mind if we amuse ourselves in the desert?"

"I'm not going to lend myself to you," he said. "What nonsense you talk! You're going back the way you came. You can play with someone else."

"You dear silly, you can't make me!" Millicent laughed at the idea. "Besides, you know you want me all the time,

and you've just promised to enjoy this jolly little meal and to lecture me afterwards. I'm not going to be unhappy because you belong to Margaret Lampton."

"So long as you know I do," he said, "I feel I can eat your excellent lunch."

"And if Margaret doesn't know, what can it matter?"

"Oh, Millicent!"

"You know, Mike, it's what's found out that matters. If you enjoy yourself and make me happy for two or three days in the desert and Margaret never knows, what harm could it do?"

"If you can't see the harm for yourself," he said, "I can't show it to you."

"Well, I can't," she said. "But let's talk of something else. Margaret is taboo—she's spoilt half our lunch."

"First tell me how you got here, how you knew of my movements. I spoke of them to no one."

"No, no, that also is taboo—until after lunch."

"What can we talk about?"

Millicent looked at him. Her eyes suggested another topic—themselves. "Is that taboo as well?" she said, as Michael's eyes dropped under hers.

"Absolutely," he said.

"Happy idea!" she cried. "The tomb! If we mayn't talk of Margaret or of our two selves or of how I got here, or of whence I came or whither you are going, surely a tomb is a safe topic?"

"Yes," Michael said, "if any topic is safe with you."

"Ah," Millicent said. "That's the nicest thing you've said."

"I didn't mean to be nice. What's nice in that?"

"But you were nice, awfully nice. If there are so many danger-zones to be avoided between us, you don't feel very safe, very sure of yourself. That's triumph number one for Millicent; Margaret's lost one point already."

"I thought Margaret was taboo?"

"Oh, so she was—I beg her pardon!" She sighed.

"'One word is too often profaned for me to profane it,' etc." She put her elbows on the table. "Oh, Mike, aren't you an odd darling? I do love teasing you. If you weren't so easily ragged, I wouldn't."

"Do go on with your lunch," he said. "And don't chatter so much. We only have a certain amount of time for lunch and digestion. This pie's delicious."

"Where are we going? When do we go on?" Millicent was not oblivious of the fact that he spoke of their going on as an accepted fact.

"So you don't know? You haven't found out everything?"

"No, I knew enough to bring me to you. That was all I wanted. You can tell me the rest."

Michael was silent.

"My dear man, you needn't tell me if you don't want to, but remember that no secrets are hid from the hand that hath *baksheesh*. I found out what I wanted to know; I can find out more."

"I'd rather you found out," he said, "than I told you."

"Right ho! Funny man!"

"Do you want to hear about the tomb, or don't you?"

"Oh, yes, rather!" Millicent's teeth were busy picking the leg of a pigeon. "Tell me everything."

Michael told her everything he could remember, the things which he knew would interest her, the most personal facts relating to the minute examination of the tomb. It was proving a great puzzle to Egyptologists. There were many conflicting theories about it—whether the mummy which was found on the floor beside the effigy of the dead queen was the mummified body of the queen or not. It had been sent away to be carefully examined by experts; the report of the examination had not yet been made known. If it was the body of the queen, why had they endeavoured to cut off the golden wrappings which had been rolled round her body? Why had her name been roughly cut out of the inside of the coffin? Why had this queen, who had

been buried with such royal magnificence, been "debarred from all benefits of the earthly prayers of her descendants? Why had she become a nameless outcast, a wanderer unrecognized and unpitied in the vast underworld?"[1]

These questions had not yet been solved. Millicent was excited and interested and Michael enjoyed telling her about it. She was inquisitive and insistent. She wanted to know all about the doings in the camp since her visit to the valley, and Michael thoroughly enjoyed talking to a sympathetic, intelligent listener. Like all Celts, he had the gift of words.

He was so engrossed that Hassan appeared with their coffee long before he was ready for it or expected it. Noticing his surprise, the man instantly took his cue. He salaamed respectfully in front of Millicent.

"*Ya, Sitt,*" he said, "will it please you to wait for another hour? The camels are not yet rested, the day is still young."

Millicent looked at Michael. Time really did not matter to him one scrap, yet she dared not hint so. He could just as well look for this phantom treasure a year from now. It was all a mystic's mirage to her, a delightful excuse for a sojourn in the outer desert.

"I'm ready if you are," she said, addressing Mike. Her woman's tact told her the wisdom of putting no hindrance in his way.

"If the Effendi will graciously consent, it would be wiser to remain here for one hour more," Hassan said. "The men are tired, also."

Michael assented. If the beasts and the men were tired, they would wait. The excuse was not unwelcome. The good meal had relaxed his energies. Hassan thanked him and silently disappeared.

Michael sipped his coffee; it was perfect. He lit a cigarette, after they had turned their chairs to the open front

[1] Weigall's *Akhnaton, Pharaoh of Egypt.*

of the shelter. Presently Millicent slipped down from her chair and sat on the sand in front of the tent; there was more air. Soon Michael did the same.

They had lunched well and were friends. A certain delicious apathy stole over Michael, which kept him from referring to any unpleasant topics. He left alone the subject as to why Millicent had trapped him and forced her company upon him. For the time being she was good and gentle, the reason being that she also was relaxed and inert—the result of a good meal after a strenuous morning on camel-back.

Michael had been riding since dawn. The temptation to let things alone was an unconscious one; he submitted to it.

A great expanse of the desert was before them. Millicent lay curled up, like a golden tortoise-shell cat, in the sun; Michael, with his legs doubled up to his chin, rested his head on his knees. He would have been asleep in a few minutes if Millicent had not spoken; suddenly she said:

"Look! Surely that's my holy man, whose reasoning powers are in heaven? There, look—far away, over there!"

Michael raised himself and looked to where she pointed. There was nothing to indicate any particular spot in the stretch of sand before them.

"I can just see the tattered rags of his staff. I'm sure it's the same man. Can't you see him?"

Michael looked again. "I can only distinguish something moving in the distance. I can't say what it is, or if it is coming this way."

"Can't you see a thing like a flag fluttering in the air? I can—there, can't you see him now?"

"Yes, now I can," Michael said. He got up from his low seat, his energies fully alert, his drowsiness gone. He held himself in check. It was absurd to appear so interested in a desert-fanatic—or an idiot—coming across their path. They were both common enough occurrences in the East.

Millicent watched his face. Why was he so thrilled, why

so interested? Michael's first impulse was to go and meet the man. He was afraid that he would not notice their encampment. He was afraid that he would not come their way. At the same time, he was conscious that if there was any truth in the old man's words, their meeting would come about naturally and not by his seeking. The "child of God" would find him out.

They waited for some time and nothing happened. Michael's hopes abated. The figure with the fluttering rags disappeared. It seemed as if it had vanished into the sands. Michael felt disappointed.

The shelter was taken down and packed up, the lunch-basket refilled and the camels harnessed. Hassan appeared.

"*Ya, Sitt*, all is ready."

Nothing had been said about Millicent's plans; nothing had been said about how she had contrived to meet Michael; no lecture had been delivered. The subject had been forgotten, forgotten by Michael at least, whose interest had been absorbed in the talk about the tomb and in the glimpse he had of the distant figure. Millicent had not forgotten the promised lecture, but it had been her object to make Michael forget it. She had gladly let the matter rest. Why wake sleeping dogs? She let them lie so undisturbed that not one bark had been heard. They slept so soundly that her heart was full of triumph and amusement when, seated on her camel, she took her place in Michael's cavalcade.

She had managed to get through the starting without his feeling any annoyance at her presence. He had simply forgotten his objection to her accompanying him.

## CHAPTER II

It was not until their rest at sundown that anything of unusual interest happened to the travellers. Their short halt while they drank their tea had passed without incident —in fact, Millicent had drunk hers alone on camel-back, for it had been carried in thermos flasks, their Amon-Ra, as Hassan called the magic bottles whose contents retained the heat with no obvious aid.

Michael had spent the time, while he drank his refreshing cup, in consulting Abdul about their route. The camels were not unsaddled. About this Millicent made no demur. She saw no earthly reason why they should not have rested for as long as they felt inclined, but she did not say so. If this treasure which Michael sought had lain in its safe hiding-place, out of sight of man, for more than two thousand years, why should it not wait there in safety for another couple or so of hours? This she kept to herself; it was her wise policy to remain *douce comme un lapin blanc*, which she did. The night might still see her an accepted part of Michael's cavalcade. The adventure thrilled her with excitement.

They had finished their evening meal, which Millicent had supplied—a very satisfying and delicate dinner. They had eaten it in the open desert during the cool hours which precede sundown. Michael had thoroughly enjoyed it. The evening light transformed the desert; a heavenly Jerusalem seemed very near. Even Millicent was obedient to the unseen.

As the sun sank lower and lower in the heavens, their conversation drifted towards the subject of Akhnaton's Aton worship. The kneeling figures of the Arabs, praying in the desert before sundown, had introduced the topic.

They sat on until the globe of gold dropped behind the horizon—a wonderful sight in the desert. For a minute or two its sudden and complete disappearance leaves the world chill and desolate; a cold hand clutches at the human heart; a loneliness enters the soul. God has abandoned the world; the warmth of His love becomes a memory.

. . . . .

The afterglow was at its most flamboyant; its orange and yellow, streaked with black, suddenly became vermilion. Lights from the underworld struck across the desert like swords of fire; arms of flame broke the vermilion, soaring to heaven like the fires from hell's furnace let loose. The anger and beauty and recklessness was appalling. Then with magic swiftness, during the flickering of an eye, the horizon became one vast lake of sacrificial blood.

The transition was so unexpected, so devastating to the human mind, that fear filled Millicent's heart. Instinctively she had drawn a little closer to Michael. She craved for arms to guard her, to protect her from the terror of the heavens.

. . . . .

Like a black silhouette against the lake of blood, a human figure rose up out of the desert, a John the Baptist, "a burning and shining light," a voice calling in the wilderness.

As the sonorous words of the Koran were borne to them, Millicent said, "Oh, Mike, it's my holy man! How mysterious he looks against that wonderful sky!"

Subconsciously Michael had been so grateful to Millicent for her silence during the stupendous glory of the sunset that his heart was full of gentleness towards her.

"Yes," he said. "I see him." Something had told him that the figure which she had described to him during luncheon would appear again; he was not surprised when he distinguished the staff, with its tattered rags waving against the crimson light.

"Isn't it all wonderful, Mike?" Her voice was reverent; the awfulness of the heavens had humbled her. "I was almost afraid—it seemed like the end of the world, the sky seemed all on fire. The destruction of the world had begun."

" 'Thy setting is beautiful, O living Aton, who guidest all countries that they may make laudation at thy dawning and at thy setting."

"Are those Akhnaton's words?"

"Yes, and his constant song was, 'O Lord, how manifold are Thy works.' Most surely he would have said so tonight." Michael's thoughts flew to the morning at whose dawn he had first recited to Margaret Akhnaton's hymn to the rising sun.

Millicent did not guess that Margaret was present while they stood together in silence, watching the blood tones grow fainter and fainter.

As they stood looking towards the horizon until all violence had left the heavens, the desert figure drew nearer. Millicent knew him by his long, unkempt hair. Even at a distance his fine white teeth gleamed against his tanned skin.

"He's a mere skeleton," Millicent said. "Look at him! He's all eyes and hair and teeth!"

"Poor creature!" Michael said. "*He* has certainly no flesh left to subdue."

As they spoke, the fanatic suddenly tottered, strode forward and fell, face downwards, on the sand of the desert. Instinctively Michael hurried forward to his assistance. There was little doubt but that he was famished and exhausted for want of food; the distances between desert villages are immense.

"Don't go!" Millicent cried. "Don't, Mike! He's probably filthy and crawling with vermin; he looked awful this morning. I'll send two of my men to him and I'll tell Hassan to prepare some food for him. Hassan! Hassan!" Her voice was clear and far-reaching.

Abdul instantly appeared. Hassan was busy giving orders to the men for pitching the tents. So quickly did Abdul come that he might have sprung up out of the desert at her very feet. This immediate response to her call always made Millicent suspicious of eavesdropping.

"Abdul," she said, "the holy man we met this morning is ill. Tell the bearers to go to him—don't let the Effendi touch him, Hassan."

"*Aiwah, Sitt,* I will attend." With the same breath Abdul screamed for two of the men to come and help the saint. They came with flying leaps towards him.

"Mike, oh Mike!" Millicent cried. "Please, please come back! You are so rash. Abdul, don't let the Effendi touch that man. He's filthy. I saw him this morning—he's a dreadful creature."

Abdul looked at the Effendi Amory's mistress, the Christian harlot. Such a woman dared to speak in this manner of one who was favoured of God, a blessed saint, of one to whom the devout women of his country would willingly give themselves as an act of grace! This child of God, beloved of Islam, was filthy in her vile eyes!

It was in this manner that Millicent unconsciously earned the vengeance of Abdul. Nothing of his hatred or scorn was noticeable. Millicent was under the impression that all Easterns are sensualists and slaves to beauty; she was ignorant of their profound contempt for all women; that their vilest thoughts are for Christians. With an outward approval for her anxiety that Michael should run no risks by touching the sick man, Abdul left her and hurried after the Effendi.

But Michael had already reached him; the fleshless figure lay bathed in the dying light of the afterglow. Hanging round his neck, a neck which looked like the neck of the dried mummy in Freddy's wonderful tomb, there were many strings of cheap beads, and suspended from a bright green cord—the Prophet's green—was one white cowrie shell. Half covered by his garment of many colours, and

jealously enclosed in a small black cloth bag, was the most precious article of his scanty possessions. Michael knew that this pouch contained nothing less valuable than a few grains of sand from the Prophet's tomb at Mecca.

At Michael's approach the fanatic raised himself and recited in half-delirious tones the *Fat'hah*, or the opening chapter of the Koran:

"In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Gracious. Praise be unto God, the Lord of the worlds, the Merciful, the Gracious, the Ruler of the day of judgment. Thee do we worship, and of Thee do we beg assistance. Direct us in the right way, in the way of those to whom Thou hast been gracious, upon whom there is no wrath, and who have not erred."

When the *sura* was finished the man fell back; his strength failed him. Michael knelt down beside him in the desert. He raised his head; his wild eyes and emaciated face touched his heart. He knew something of the zeal of these religious Moslems, these desert sons of Allah. This man had obviously wasted himself to a skeleton. Truly, his reasoning powers were in heaven; his religious ecstasies had well-nigh bereft him of his senses.

Michael asked him if he was ill or if he was only faint from want of food. The saint did not know; physical exhaustion overpowered him. At intervals he called loudly upon the name of Allah, in almost the same phraseology as the ancient Egyptians called upon Amon-Ra, the Lord of all worlds, whose seat was in the heavens. In the unchanging East, expressions never die. Akhnaton taught his disciples to pray to "Our Father, which art in Heaven."

As Michael listened to his appeals to Allah, he felt totally at a loss to know what to do for the material benefit of the zealot. He was afraid that he would die from exhaustion. He was relieved when Abdul and the bearers came to his assistance. Abdul soon persuaded the man to drink some of the water which he had brought in a cup. As he did so, he noticed with satisfaction that the saint's

head was resting on Michael's arm, that his master was totally self-forgetful in his act of charity. Christian though he was, he was sincerely obeying the teaching of the Prophet Jesus, the one sinless Prophet of Islam, the Prophet Who, next to Mohammed, is best beloved of the faithful. Mohammed considered Jesus sinless; to his own unrighteousness he often alluded. In this act of grace, at least, the Effendi had not failed Him.

When Michael offered the man another cooling drink, he swallowed it eagerly. It was like the waters of paradise to his parched throat. His flaming eyes tried to express his gratitude to his deliverer. Who was this heretic whose fingers had the gift of healing, from whose heart flowed the divine waters of charity?

Michael understood. Inspired by the love in his heart for all suffering humanity, with something akin to the graceful imagery of words which comes naturally to the humblest native's lips, he spoke to the man in a suitable manner. Rendered into English it would sound absurd.

The servants appeared with some food which was sustaining and appetizing, but the effort necessary for swallowing anything solid proved too much for the exhausted pilgrim.

"Bring him to the camp, Abdul," Michael said. "I will give him some brandy. As a medicine it is not forbidden?"

"No, Effendi, it is not forbidden."

The total absence of the sun had made the desert seem inhospitable and dreary. The saint was too weak to protest and so he was carried to the camp. Millicent watched the slow procession with anger and amazement. She knew that Michael was rash and impetuous, but she had not given him credit for being such a fool.

While he was being put to bed in a tent, and carefully attended to, Michael tried to discover if the saint was really ill, if he was suffering from some specific malady, or if he was merely worn out with fatigue. He administered a

drug to him which he hoped would soothe his nerves and allow him to sleep.

In a dog-like manner the man's tragic eyes eloquently expressed both his astonishment and gratitude. It was long since he had slept in a comfortable bed, under sheets and blankets. He rarely spoke, except to mutter or loudly chant in a half-delirious manner *suras* from the Koran.

When Michael had attended to his simple wants and seen to it that his servants were not only willing but eager to nurse him, he left him to their care and immediately hurried off to his own tent to change his clothes and disinfect himself as thoroughly as possible—a necessary precaution, although the man had not been as dirty as Millicent had depicted. His *dilk*, or Joseph's coat, was indeed tattered and his turban in the last stages of decay, but they were clean. His person was not offensive. A pathetic figure, fleshless and worn and neurotic; yet in the sands of the desert he had performed his ablutions before prayer, as prescribed by the Prophet in the Holy Book. The untrodden sands of the desert are as cleansing and purifying as the waters of Jordan.

When Michael at last returned to Millicent, she said quite gently, although her inward woman burned with anger, "Mike, are you mad or a saint? How could you touch him?"

"I'm far from being a saint!" he said.

"You are as much one as that wretched creature, who has pretended he is one for so long that he now believes he is."

"Or his Moslem brethren do, perhaps you mean!"

"Well, he acts up to their superstitious ideas."

"I can't tell. He is too ill to speak. He is probably as sincere a Moslem as St. Jerome was a Christian—why not?"

"What's the matter with him?" A little fear clutched at Millicent's heart.

"I don't know—Abdul couldn't discover. The man is

too exhausted to talk. I'll speak to him in the morning and find out."

"I hope it's nothing infectious—you were very rash, Mike!"

"It's probably only physical exhaustion. He couldn't eat anything, but he drank the water I gave him. I poured a little brandy in it—he wouldn't have touched it if he had known."

"Oh, wouldn't he?" Millicent's voice expressed her disbelief.

"The Koran forbids the drinking of spirits."

Millicent laughed. "You wouldn't think so when you pass the native cafés in Cairo! I thought you said they lived up to the letter of their religion, and missed the spiritual essence of it?"

"There are Moslems and Moslems. Do we all live up to the spirit of Christ's teachings? Have you always seen Christ-like Christians?"

Millicent shrugged her shoulders. "Well, I don't pretend to live up to the spirit of my religion. There's the comforting reflection of a death-bed repentance for all Christians—it's never to late to mend, Mike!"

"What about battle and murder and sudden death?"

"I take that risk. But, honestly, dear, are you going to adopt that fanatic, take him on with you?"

"I'm going to look after him until he's better," Michael said, "if that's what you mean."

"You've got one *protégé* in el-Azhar. I wonder where this one will find his home?"

"He will be all right in the morning. Some food and sleep will set him on his way again." Michael's eyes expressed the fact that his thoughts had travelled to Millicent's own position in his camp. She had wished to avoid this; she had tried to obliterate her own personality. Her desire was to let Mike get pleasantly accustomed to her companionship, to her place in his camp, to her harmless presence. She felt certain that if she could manage it for

a day or two, he would let things slide. It was his nature to drift.

The evening was almost at its close; night was drawing near. The evening star, with its one clear call, had appeared in the pale sky, guarded by the soft pure crescent of a new moon. The single star in the vast heavens made a tender appeal to the hearts of both Millicent and Michael. It intensified their solitude. It touched their senses with longing. If Margaret had been with Michael, his arms would have encircled her.

Millicent owed her self-restraint to her calculating common sense. To have had a lover on such a night as this would have been a splendid reward for all her trouble. In her heart she called the man at her side a fool, a pitiful fool, and herself an idiot for loving him.

"It was a beautiful idea for Mohammed's banner," Michael said at length. He had driven the thought even of Margaret from his mind. Suggestion is too potent a drug.

"Was that what he took it from?" Millicent said. "I never thought of it before—of course, it must have been."

"He must often have watched the evening star as we are watching it now, when he was a boy living in the desert. Later on, when he became the warrior prophet, he must have visualized the heavens as the background of his banner, and taken the evening star and the crescent moon as his symbols—the star and the crescent of Islam." Michael paused. "In the same way, the full rays of the sun became the symbol of Aton, Akhnaton's god and loving father."

"Your friend?" Millicent said eagerly; it pleased her that Michael should speak of the things nearest his heart. He was allowing her to approach him.

Michael laughed. "And yours, too, I hope?"

"Why?" Millicent's heart quickened.

"Because Akhnaton was the first man to preach simplicity, honesty, frankness and sincerity, and he preached it from a throne. He was the first Pharaoh to be a humani-

tarian, the first man in whose heart there was no trace of barbarism."[1]

"Really?" Millicent said. Michael's earnestness forbade levity. "How interesting! Do tell me more about him."

"He was the first human being to understand rightly the meaning of divinity."

"But what he taught didn't last. We owe nothing to his doctrines, do we? Did it ever spread beyond his own kingdom?"

"Like other great teachers, he sacrificed all to his principles. Yet there can be no question that his ideals will hold good 'till the swan turns black and the crow turns white, till the hills rise up and travel and the deeps rush into the rivers.' That's how Weigall ends up the life he has written of the great reformer. How can you say that we owe nothing to him? You might as well say that we owe nothing to any of the great men of whom we have never heard, and yet you know that thought affects the whole world. Akhnaton made himself immortal by his prophecies—they were the eternal truths revealed to him by God."

"By a prophet, do you mean that he was a prophet like Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah and so on?"

"I mean that prophets were the seers to whom God communicated knowledge. Prophets were the people to whom He made revelations; he enlightened their minds; He certainly revealed Himself to Akhnaton, or how else could he, in that age of darkness, have evolved for himself an almost perfect conception of divinity? Weigall says 'he evolved a monotheist's religion second only to Christianity itself in its purity of tone.' If God had not revealed Himself to Akhnaton as He did later on to Moses and Abraham, and as I believe He still does to our true reformers, how could he, as Weigall says, have evolved his beautiful religion 'in an age of superstition, and in a land where the grossest polytheism reigned absolutely supreme'?"

[1] Weigall's Akhnaton, *Pharaoh of Egypt.*

"And are you now on your way to visit his tomb, Mike? How thrilling!"

"Yes," Michael said. He answered her simply, forgetful of the fact that she could only have obtained her information on this point in an underhand manner.

"You know where it is?"

"He was buried in the hills which lie beyond his city."

"Tel-el-Amarna?"

"Yes, the City of the Horizon, the capital he built when he found it necessary for the progress of his new religion to get away from Thebes, from the priests of Amon-Ra."

Michael's thoughts became absorbed. They travelled to the mid-African in el-Azhar and then became mixed up with this meeting with the desert-saint. Could this poor, emaciated figure, so shrunken and worn with tropical fevers and famished for want of food, have any knowledge of the hidden treasure which the seer had visualized?

Millicent allowed his thoughts to wander. She knew the force of silent companionship. She knew that, although he was apparently far from her, he was conscious of her presence. She would have liked to ask him a thousand questions, to have talked rather than held her peace; but her instinct as a woman forbade it. Something told her that during their talk Michael was one half saint, one half man, and the man-power was stronger than he knew.

Many stars had appeared in the sky, which had deepened. It was now the violet-blue of a desert night. The passion of the heavens was beginning. Could man and woman remain outside it?

In the distance an occasional roar from one of the camels interrupted the silence. Surely it was a night for love, the love that needs no telling!

Millicent and Michael were seated on the sand, gazing into the deepening heavens. Michael was sorely disturbed.

"Could anything be more Eastern?" Millicent said dreamily. In speech she had to walk very carefully. Her mystic baffled her.

"Nothing," Michael said. "Isn't it sad to think what city-dwellers miss?"

"I love even the roar of the camels, don't you?" Her eyes were looking at the animals, as they knelt at rest in the distance, their long day's journey done. What stored-up revenge their roars suggest! They always seem to say, "My day will come, if it is yours to-day."

"Let's think of the most English thing we can, Mike," she said suddenly, "just by way of contrast."

They thought for a moment or two in silence. The arid desert was softened by the absence of the sun, its desolation was made more manifest. At night even more than by day, you could feel the immensity of its distance, its silent rolling from ocean to ocean. Nothing speaks to man's heart more eloquently than the voice of perfect silence.

For the sake of prudence Michael was consenting to Millicent's suggestion to think of the most English scene he could. Was it a village public-house, full of hearty English yokels, drinking their evening tankards of beer? This was about the time they would assemble. He had not yet formed his picture into words, Millicent had not spoken, when suddenly Abdul appeared and begged permission to speak to his master.

The sick man was better; he had eaten some food and was conscious. Abdul had evidently some information which was for his master's ear alone. He politely inferred that he could not say it before the honourable lady.

Michael rose from his seat beside Millicent, who, being wise in her generation, said: "Then I will say good-night and go to bed. I am very tired."

"Good-night," Michael said brightly, while a sudden sense of relief came to his heart. "I think you are very wise. You must be quite tired out."

"So far, so good," Millicent said when she was alone. "What a weird mystic I've attached myself to!" She alluded to Michael, not to the Moslem saint.

Her camp-outfit was so complete that in her desert bed-

room there was scarcely an item missing which could ensure her comfort. She contemplated going to bed with enjoyment. Where money is, there also are the fleshpots of Egypt, even if it is in the waterless tracts of the Arabian desert.

Material comforts meant very much to Millicent. She enjoyed using all the little accessories belonging to a fastidious woman's toilet; she enjoyed, too, the occupation of expending care on her person. Her rising up and lying down were ceremonies which she performed with unremitting attention. In her tent in the desert her perfumes and cosmetics and bath-salts afforded her a curious satisfaction. They told her that her management had been perfect; they appealed to her barbaric love of contrasts. It fed her pride very pleasantly to know that she could command these luxuries; to know that by her own wealth she could bring the trivialities of civilization into the elemental life of the desert excited her senses.

Her natural beauty could have triumphed over the ravages made by the sun and the dry desert air. She was one of those fortunate women who needed few, if any, of the absurdities which she carried about with her wheresoever she went. To have done without them would have been to deprive herself of a very genuine pleasure, to have starved one of her eager appetites. Margaret's rapid tub, the swift brushing and combing and plaiting of her dark hair, generally while she read some passage from a book which interested her, and her total disregard for cosmetics, would have horrified Millicent if she had known of her habits. The height of civilization to Millicent was expressed in a luxuriously-appointed dressing-table and in an excessive care of her body. Progress touched its high-water mark in the perfection of her creature comforts. Taken from this standpoint, progress could scarcely go any further, or so Michael would have thought if he had watched her ritual of going to bed.

She dawdled pleasantly through it, enjoying every mo-

ment of the time, appreciating the handling of artistically-designed silver objects, performing with care the washing of her face with oatmeal and the dusting of her fair skin with the latest luxury in powder. She liked to take the same care of her person as a young mother takes of her first baby, and—as she expressed it—to smell like one when the ceremony was finished.

Her love of contrasts appealed to her, when she stood, all ready for bed in her foolish nightgown—a mere veil of chiffon—becomingly guarded by a Japanese kimono of the softest silk. She visualized the timeless desert outside her tent, the trackless ocean of silence, the uninhabited primitive world. She felt like a queen, travelling in state through a waterless, foodless world.

She held up her empty arms. Some other night! Some other night! Her heart assured her. With a sigh of content she lay down to sleep, well satisfied with her own diplomacy and cunning. Her last conscious thoughts were of Margaret Lampton. What was she doing to-night? What were her thoughts?

. . . . . .

Late that night, as Abdul passed the Englishwoman's tent, he spat at her door.

## CHAPTER III

WHAT was Margaret doing that night?

Many days had passed since she had heard from Michael, but there was nothing in that to cause her anxiety. She did not expect to hear from him after his desert journey had begun, except by happy chance. If he passed a desert mail-carrier, he would give him a letter to be posted when he arrived at the nearest town.

A desert mail-carrier is a weird object to Western eyes or to the eyes of a city-dweller. Almost naked, he travels

across the desert on swift camels, carrying a long sword for the protection of the royal mails.

So far Margaret had received no desert letter. Her days had passed smoothly and swiftly, for Freddy had kept her hard at work. Each day her interest in his work intensified; the more she learned of Egyptology and of archæology generally, the more wholly absorbing it became. She had developed into a very essential member of the camp.

With splendid common sense and determination, she had succeeded in throwing herself body and soul into the work which filled her days. She had made up her mind when she parted with Michael that not even by thought would she retard his work and mission. When she allowed her mind to travel to him, it was to convey currents of stimulating love and encouragement. If thoughts are things, as he always told her, then the things her thoughts were to give him must be happiness and confidence. Keeping this steadily before her, she had spent healthy, happy days with her brother. In their sympathies and interests they had drawn even closer together. Strangers might well have taken them for lovers, so eagerly did they look forward each morning to their long evening to be spent together. There was very little time for play; their days were made up of hard, exacting work.

Experts were busy forming their opinions and writing their official reports upon the contested subjects connected with the tomb. The mythological and archæological finds in it were of exceptional interest.

On this night, when Millicent in the eastern desert had held up her arms to the heavens and questioned the unseen, Margaret had gone early to bed. For some reason—perhaps owing to the great heat of the day and to the airlessness of the chamber of the tomb where she had been painting, she had felt a bit "nervy," as she had expressed her state of being to Freddy. She had tried to read, but had failed. Her thoughts had wandered; her memory had

retained nothing of what she had read; at the end of a paragraph she knew as little of what it had been about as though she had never read it. Concentration was beyond her power.

"I'm only wasting time, Freddy," she said after a last desperate effort to concentrate her thoughts on her book. "I'm going to bed. If I talked, I'd probably grouse—that's how I feel."

"Right you are, old girl. I'll soon be off, too. How'd you like to go to Luxor for a few days?"

"Oh, no, Freddy!" Meg's whole being rejected the idea.

"All right—only don't get the jumps."

"A good sleep will put me right," she bent her head as she passed her brother and lightly kissed his glittering hair. He was busy with a plan, of extraordinarily minute details. "You're such a dear, Freddy."

"Rot!"

"You are, a thumping old dear."

"Don't you worry, old girl. Mike's all right. Bad news travels on bat's wings, so they say. You'd have heard long before this if anything was wrong."

It was just like Freddy to understand. Meg felt cheered. She sat herself down beside him, quite close to his elbow, and watched him for some moments. They were perfectly silent. Freddy's practical, healthy, buoyant personality soothed her. Her big love for him brought a sudden lump to her throat. Happy tears dimmed her sight. Hungrily she pressed his arm close to hers and rubbed her cheek against his coat. The next moment she had left the room.

Freddy's eyes followed her. "Not the life for a girl, somehow," he said, a line of worry puckering his forehead, and for a few moments his thoughts deserted his work. It became faulty; he had to use his india-rubber over and over again. It was Meg's vision of Akhnaton that had intruded itself upon his work; he must drag his thoughts back again.

Meg had told him about her vision. Before the tomb had

been opened, Freddy would have completely pooh-poohed the whole thing. He gave no real credence to it now; still, there was a subtle difference in his attitude towards the whole subject of the supernatural. His mind did not so completely reject it as he thought. The extraordinary exactness of the seer's vision of the inside of the tomb had not been without its effect. He also knew how constantly and ardently Akhnaton had prayed that his spirit might "go forth to see the sun's rays," that his "two eyes might be opened to see the sun," that he might "obtain a sight of the beauty of each recurring sunrise."

. . . . .

When Meg went to bed, she slept soundly, very soundly. She must have been asleep for some hours when suddenly she awoke with unusual alertness. The intensity of her dream had wakened her. She had heard Michael's voice crying, as though it were vainly trying to reach her. It was as clear as the overseer's whistle each morning; it had wakened her just as suddenly. The anguish of his soul came to her out of the silence. Three times he had called her distinctly.

She started up, with the words "Yes, Mike, I'm coming." They were said before she realized that she was separated from him by the Valley and the river and the eastern desert.

Sitting up in bed she listened. Everything was still. She jumped out of bed and looked out of the window. The stars in the sky shone down on the hills which covered the sleeping Pharaohs as they had shone when Michael had told her that he loved her, as they had shone before the Valley became a city of the dead.

Margaret slipped on her dressing-gown and opened the door. She went quietly out and stood in front of the hut, with eyes raised to the heavens. She felt as if her heart was bursting with the prayers that filled it. What could she do? Nothing—nothing but give herself up to God, open her heart and reveal its burden to the Lord of all

worlds, trust her inarticulate prayers to His everlasting mercy. Very softly she whispered, almost ashamed of her own impotence, "I want to go to Michael. Allow my spirit to console him."

Her hands were clenched. An imploring agony held her unconscious of all else but her desire to get outside herself and appear to her lover. She had no more words; speech was needless. Her wants were as infinitely beyond the limits of speech, as infinity is beyond our conception of space or time.

For a few minutes she stood lost in the one thought. And who shall say in what name her prayer was answered by the divine mercy?

Gradually a subtle untightening of her muscles relaxed her hands even while they remained folded. Something had gone out of her. Was it virtue? Unconscious of her material self, for her thoughts had not yet returned from their mission of healing, she remained standing in the same attitude of appeal.

Suddenly her imagination folded her in her lover's arms. She heard him say, "My beautiful Meg, the stars adore you!"

And she answered, "I am with you, Mike, just as I was on that night when your love made a new world for me. You called to me and so I came. Your arms are round me. . . . I can hear your voice."

Margaret sighed. Consciousness of her material surroundings was returning. She heard a step behind her; someone was present. It was Freddy.

"What are you doing, Meg?" he said anxiously.

She turned swiftly to him. "Oh, Freddy, Michael wanted me. My dream was too real not to have some meaning. I couldn't bear it—I had to try to help him!"

"You were dreaming? You were in bed?"

"Yes, and sound asleep. Suddenly he called me. It was extraordinarily real." Meg put her hands up to her head as though it was tired.

"But you can't help him by standing out here. It's too chilly."

Meg shivered. "It is cold," she said wearily. "And I'm awfully tired."

Freddy linked his arm through his sister's. "Let's sit and talk together indoors, for a bit. Have a cigarette?"

Meg thanked him with tired eyes. Freddy put his hands on her shoulders as she sank into a deck-chair, and looked into her eyes. "No more visions, old girl?"

"No, Freddy, oh no, no vision." Meg spoke dreamily, absently, and with an exhaustion which worried her brother.

"Then why so tired?"

"I don't know. I suppose it was my dream. I feel as if I'd travelled for days and days!"

"Look here, you're going to have some of this." Freddy poured out a small portion of brandy into a glass and made her swallow it. "The desert plays the dickens with the strongest nerves. Don't be so rash again, Meg."

"I promise." Meg swallowed the brandy and Freddy lit her cigarette. With a tact she little dreamed of he contrived to divert her thoughts into a channel far removed from the eastern desert and personal matters.

The news from home for the last few weeks had been far from satisfactory. English politics seemed to revolve round the atrocious acts of the suffragettes who believed in the militant policy and the disturbances in Ireland. Freddy's sympathies, of course, were with Ulster; the Nationalists and Sinn Feiners belonged to the unemployable unemployed class of agitators who "walk on their heads."

When at last the brother and sister parted, Meg was restored both in mind and body to her normal healthy condition.

## CHAPTER IV

WHEN Michael entered the sick man't tent, he was surprised to find how much better he seemed. He had regained a little strength and partial consciousness. But he was still weak and suffering from the effects of malarial fever, or so Michael imagined, though he was articulate and his mind seemed to be clearing.

The more Michael saw of him the more sure he was that he was neither an idiot nor a lunatic, nor one of the class in the East whose flagrant acts of immorality do not affect their fame for sanctity. Certainly his thoughts and reasoning powers appeared still to be in heaven, but that was because he was a religious zealot. Of the genuineness of his piety there could be no doubt. The impostors and charlatans who bring discredit upon the term "holy man," who trade upon the credulity of the natives, do not seek the wastes of the arid eastern desert. The neighbourhood of hospitable villages and cities suits their profession and tastes better.

The saint had requested of Abdul that he might thank the Effendi for his charity. Before sunrise he wished to leave the tent.

As Michael approached him, he called out in a weak but sonorous voice a *sura* from the Koran:

" 'Verily those who do deeds of real kindness shall drink of a cup tempered with camphor.' "

The word camphor (*kafier*), which is derived from the word *kafr*, means to "suppress or cover." Michael understood. The quaffing of camphor, as spoken of in the Koran, is supposed to subdue unlawful passions; it cleanses the heart; it rids man's mind of all material desires.

"I thank you, O my father." Michael used the ordinary form of a Moslem in addressing one of a higher spiritual station than himself. In Egypt even the native Christians reverence Moslem saints or holy men. They pay frequent visits to them to ask for counsel and to hear their prophecies, to beg a hair of them in memory, "and dying, mention it within their wills, bequeathing it as a rich legacy unto their issue." Any relic of a venerated saint is worn as a protection from evil.

Quite apart from Michael's feeling on the subject as to whether this desert fanatic would prove of any real assistance to him on his journey, he had no inclination to scoff at his religious zeal. Were there not St. Jeromes, who lived in the desert and trusted to the ravens of the air to feed them? Were passions in the desert not known before the days of Mohammed? Why should saints no longer exist?

It seemed to him very wonderful that this semi-conscious Arab should have chosen a text from the Koran so singularly appropriate to his condition. There were hundreds of *suras* familiar to Michael, relating to the benefits to be received by the faithful who performed disinterested acts of charity. "Do good to the creatures of God, for God loves those who do good." These words came to his mind as more suitable, as referring only to his hospitality to the fainting wayfarer. Or again, "The truly righteous are those who, in order to please God, assist their kindred out of their wealth, and support the orphans and take care of the needy, and give alms to the wayfarer."

In the moral conditions of the Koran, there are many *suras* relating to charity, the love which covers a multitude of sins. Yet he had told Michael that because of his love for one of God's creatures he would "drink of a cup tempered with camphor." Had the sick man a seer's vision? Had he read the secrets of his, Michael's, heart?

Or might it have been that already Abdul had confided to him the gossip of the camp? Had his seer's eyes told him

who lay in the white tent, the white tent whose open door so persistently invited him to turn in?

He rejected the idea that the saint's apt choice of a text could have been mere accident. To Michael there was no such thing as chance. Nothing is unessential, nothing unforeseen by the All-seeing.

He spoke to the saint seriously and sympathetically of his condition and tried to persuade him that he was too weak to travel. He must rest for one whole day, and after that he must allow Michael to see him on his journey. To Michael's offer of hospitality and help on his pilgrimage, he again answered by quoting the Koran:

"'Verily to the "favoured of God" no fear shall come, nor shall they grieve.'"

His eyes, lit with spiritual fire, expressed his complete confidence in divine protection.

Michael expressed his belief that God did look after those who were specially favoured of Him, but he asked if it might not be that it was by God's guidance that he, Michael, had been permitted to offer one specially beloved of Allah the rest he so greatly needed? If it was not also decreed by Allah that the saint should remain in his tent until he was stronger?

"Whither are you going, O my son? If Allah wills it we shall not part."

Michael described his geographical destination; he did not mention the real mission of his journey.

"What seek you there, O my son?"

"The tomb of a holy man."

"An infidel or a child of Allah?"

"Of a prophet, O my father, a prophet to whom God revealed Himself even before the days of Moses, a prophet born in Egypt, who lost his distant kingdoms to gain his own soul."

"Your heart is full of charity, O my son. In the name

of the Lord, the Compassionate, the Merciful, may the divine light surround you."

"If I acknowledge but one God, O my father, and truly love Him, I must love all things that He has created, for without Him was not anything made that is in heaven or on earth."

"Truly said, O my son. And praise be to Allah! you are no infidel. You worship but the one God Who is the Lord of the worlds. The ignorant infidels—Allah have mercy on their souls!—give the Prophet Jesus equal glory with the God Almighty, they divide the honours which belong to God alone."

"There are many seekers after the truth, O my father. Are there not many roads to heaven?"

"To all who do truly seek the light, God will be revealed to them. He will discover them with His mercy, He will join them to the companionship on high. God's mercy extends to every sinner, He provides for even those who deny Him."

The fanatic fell back on his pillow exhausted. Michael waited for a moment, until his religious excitement had abated. Feebly words came from his parched lips.

"Great is Thy Name, great is Thy Greatness. There is no God but Thee."

Michael poured a little moisture down his throat. He swallowed it eagerly; his thirst was pathetic. After waiting for a few minutes beside the silent figure, Michael rose to go. One of the servants must come and look after him and watch him during the night; he was too ill to be left alone.

Suddenly the saint called to him. "*Henâ* (here)." He wished Michael to bend his head nearer to his lips; his voice was weak. His splendid eyes glowed with the fire of spiritual triumph. Michael watched him raise his hand up to his head. It was for some reason, for it was not without effort that he guided his first finger to his fine, delicately-shaped ear, the concha of which was very large. There

seemed to be something hidden in it which he was endeavouring to take out.

Michael tried to help him. Had he stowed away some relic of exceptional value in the opening of his ear, or was it giving him pain? The saint did not answer. Michael stood in silence until the thing was extracted. It was a little pellet of tissue-paper.

The saint put his finger to his lips, to caution Michael to be silent. With trembling fingers he unwrapped the tiny packet. It was so small that probably it contained an atom of hair reputed to have been cut from the Prophet's beard.

When the object was unrolled, the saint said, "*Henâ*," and tried to reach Michael's hand. Michael placed his right hand in the two emaciated ones of the fanatic. Something hard was pressed into his palm, and his fingers were jealously folded over a tiny object. When it was safely in his keeping, the saint fell back on his pillow, muttering a *sura* from the Koran.

" 'Give your kindred what they require in time of need and also to the poor and the traveller, but waste not your substance wastefully.' "

Michael opened his hand and looked at what the zealot had placed in it. He was thrilled with curiosity to see what the precious relic could be. He recognized the greatness of the honour which had been bestowed upon him.

When he saw what it was, he was too astonished to speak. Wonder robbed him of words. A crimson amethyst, uncut and of ancient smoothness, lay like a large drop of blood in his hand. With half-believing eyes he gazed at it. Still in silence and with doubting senses, he turned it over with the fingers of his left hand. Had the holy man performed a miracle? How could he have become possessed of an ancient gem of such rare beauty and size? Michael had often seen conjurers raise up palm-trees and flowers on the deck of a steamer, out of a pot full of sand; a wave of their magic wand had transformed the deck of a steamer into a

flowery garden. But this poor sick wanderer was no trickster.

Michael held up the amethyst to a lamp. It seemed to him a stone of great value. As it was uncut, he could only judge by its colour. There might be some flaw which he could not see. He tried to put it back into the sick man's hands.

"Keep it, my son, it is safer with you. I could not use it for the benefit of mankind, for the wayfarer and the needy, and for myself I have no wants which Allah in His mercy does not supply. His children suffer no greater privations than they can bear."

Michael still pressed the jewel back into his hand. He could not and would not accept it. At his refusal the fanatic became excited and distressed.

"It is easy for me, my son, to find many more such jewels, and also much fine gold, the pure gold of Ethiopia. Allah has had hidden treasures laid up in the desert for such of His favoured children as require them."

The words came curiously to Michael's ears, for he had in his subconscious mind anticipated them. Yet his material mind regarded them as fantastic imagination due to the man's abnormal condition. The unpolished jewel had probably been given to him by a devout Moslem, who imagined that he had derived some benefit from a visit which he had paid to the saint. His subconscious mind pressed the question: Had this poor creature, dressed in rags, whose famished body had fallen in the sands, exhausted by his perpetual mortification of the flesh, found Akhnaton's buried treasure? Had he resisted the gold and precious jewels which he had found there? Had he only carried away this one crimson amethyst to prove to Michael that his theory was correct? Was it a beautiful link in the long chain of ordained events, an act of the divine law?

The idea seemed incredible. Yet the saint had spoken simply and sincerely, as if he never doubted but that Allah,

in His all-seeing mercy, had provided this mine of wealth for the use of His favoured.

Was this gem which the saint had carried in his ear an actual and tangible proof of the treasure he was seeking? Had the saint actually seen and touched the wealth of gold and the jewels which Akhnaton's hands had hidden in the hills near his tomb? Others besides Michael, students of Egyptology, had treasured the idea that the heretic King, knowing that his days were numbered, and that when he was dead everything in his fair city would be stolen and desecrated, taken to Thebes and there turned into wealth for the gods of Amon, had hid from his enemies his private hoard of jewels and gold.

A glorious excitement overwhelmed Michael. His thoughts travelled on the wings of light. But he must be practical; he must determine how it was best to question the saint, to gather from him the most helpful information on the subject. It would be no easy matter, for it would be unwise to express any marked curiosity about the hidden treasure or to show his personal desire to find it.

With great self-control he concealed his intense interest and excitement. For the present it was best to let the saint's words about the treasure pass unquestioned. Very tactfully and with gentleness he persuaded him to keep the amethyst until they parted. In the morning, if he was really strong enough to go on his way and if he still wished him to accept the gem, he would do so.

With this the fanatic was contented. He wrapped up the gem which had once belonged to the heretic Pharaoh, whose one and only God was Aton, and replaced it in its strange jewel-case.

. . . . .

When Michael left the tent where the saint lay, he turned his back on the encampment. He wished to be alone. His thoughts were bewildering. He turned his back upon the encampment because the crouching man in him knew that in the camp was the white tent of the woman. If he passed

it, would the primitive man in him spring up and force him to turn in?

"Turn in, turn in, my lord, and he did turn in." How the words had kept ringing in his ears.

Alone in the desert he must drink of the cup tempered with camphor. Henceforth his one thought and object must be the finding of the treasure he had journeyed thus far to discover. The saint's news had so excited him that he wished that he could waken all the sleeping servants and order Abdul to begin their journey. Action would drive the white tent and its persistent call out of his mind. The sky was so light that they could easily see to travel.

His nerves chafed at the unnecessary delay. And yet he must not hurry, for his mind foresaw great difficulty, even in the matter of persuading the holy man to travel with them.

The seer at el-Azhar had promised him that a "child of God" would lead him. If he waited and trusted and just let things take their course, all things would come right. Haste comes of the devil—a true Eastern proverb, a warning far too little regarded by the Western children of speed. But his conscience rebuked him. Had he verily been one of those who do deeds of real kindness? Was he worthy to drink of the cup tempered with camphor? Had his deed been sincerely inspired by disinterested love towards his fellow-beings? Had it not been so mingled and mixed up with his anxiety to find the hidden treasure that he had gladly seized the opportunity of offering help to the wayfarer, hoping that he might prove to be the very child of God who was to guide him to the secret spot?

Yet surely, in doing this deed of kindness, even though it was affected by self-interest, he had already drunk of the cup tempered with camphor? The desires of his frail human flesh, desires which had had their renaissance since Millicent's appearance, were they quite banished? Had the woman in her white tent meant nothing to him? As if in

contradiction to his words, he flung himself on the sand. A voice cried within him.

What was he to do with the woman? Oh, God, what was he to do with her? Spiritually he emptied his arms of her and flung her far from him on the sands. All day her presence had been too near him—oh, God, far too near! She was there in her tent, a beautiful vision. Her eyes, as violet as the night sky, invited him. Her voice, soft with love, wooed him. It cried again and again: "Turn in, my lord, turn in!"

His knowledge of the East told him that the whole camp expected him to visit the white tent that night. He was no St. Anthony in their eyes, resisting his temptation.

For one moment his mind enjoyed the satisfaction of her beauty. The cup tempered with camphor was rudely dashed from his lips. Some unseen hand had offered him instead the deep red wine of passion. With the sudden violence of a southern wind gathering swiftly over the desert, his emotions were tossed and driven. As the sands lift and rise from the flatness of the desert into one obliterating column before the traveller's eyes, so had his vision of the woman obliterated every other thought from his mind. In the limitless desert there was nothing but the one white tent of the woman.

In his vision he saw the crimson amethyst hanging from a chain round her neck. On her white breast it lay like a full drop of pigeon's blood. Where had this idea come from? Unsought, undesired, what had forced it with merciless vividness before his eyes? What part of him responded to her caresses of thanks? What had Akhnaton's jewel to do with his profane vision?

St. Anthony had never deserved his temptation less. With the distant glimpse of the white tent which he had caught on his way from the sick man, desire had stormed the citadel of his soul. Its hidden forces had surprised and overwhelmed the unsuspecting Michael. It held him in its grip.

In his agony of spirit he cried aloud. "Margaret! Margaret! Margaret, if you love me, come to me!"

He pressed his body more closely to the desert sand. Let the great Mother Earth enfold him.

With all the stars in the heavens shining down upon him, and the clear sky purifying a world of desolation, Michael lay purging his mind, cleansing his heart. The white tent became very distant, a mere speck on his mental horizon.

Suddenly his senses became alert; he felt a presence very close to him. No footfall on the sand had warned him that he was no longer alone; he was simply conscious that some one was standing by his side. He jumped up, anxious to see who it was; he had been lying face downwards on the sand. No one was there. He listened. Surely he had not been mistaken? Someone had touched him gently with their hands, some presence had come quite close to him. He was conscious that a feeling of peace had come to him, as if virtue had passed into him from those unseen hands. Then suddenly he knew that Margaret was beside him; they were standing together as they had stood together on the night when they plighted their troth. He could hear her saying, "I have come to you, Mike. You called me and so I came." He could feel the divine beauty of her passion, the exquisite wonder of her love. Her presence was as real and helpful to him as though his arms encircled her material body.

In the midst of his happiness a sense of shame overwhelmed him. Margaret had come to him because she understood; his sense of shame evoked her sympathy. He heard her say, "But Mike, I shall understand. I think something outside myself will help me to understand."

He could see her starlit face. He remembered how he had turned it up to the heavens and said, "You beautiful Meg, the stars adore you!" His own words rang in his ears.

She had come to help him to make his love for her still more complete. She was with him still. He enfolded her in his arms and wept out his passion on her breast.

## CHAPTER V

"LET's begin where we left off yesterday, Mike," Millicent said.

They had finished their lunch and were sitting in the desert watching the "common or garden" day's idleness of the inhabitants of a Bedouin camp. The tents were huddled together under the shade of some feathery-leaved palm-trees, a typical desert homestead.

They had made a short excursion from the site of their own camp, for the sick man's condition had necessitated their halting for at least one whole day.

Subtly conscious of the fact that Satan finds some mischief even in the desert for idle hands to do, Michael had suggested a picnic to a small oasis which lay to the west of their route. Millicent and her dragoman and her servants still formed a part of his camp; her splendid supply of food and medicines was so valuable for the saint that Michael's silent consent to her presence had been given. Again he was drifting.

"Let us return to where we left off yesterday," referred to her suggestion of the evening before that they should tell each other of the most English thing they could imagine, things seen in England as in comparison to things seen in Egypt.

It was a typically Eastern scene which lay before them—the yellow sands of the Arabian desert, the dark palm-trees and the picturesque Bedouins idling under the shelter of the palms. Not one of the group was occupied. Some goats and a great number of naked children were lying about on the sand. The purple shadows of the palm-trees intensified the bareness of the sunny desert.

One little figure, with a very protruding stomach, and a very large white metal disc on her dark chest for her only

article of attire, suddenly appeared in front of them. Silently she had risen up out of the hot sand at their feet. Her big eyes stared at the two strange beings whom she had been brave enough to approach. When Millicent spoke to her she screamed and flew back to her mother's side. The woman looked like a man, clean-limbed and as tanned as leather. Her tent was supported by two sticks; to enter it she had to bend almost double.

The naked child had appeared so suddenly and it had run away so swiftly, that Millicent laughed like a child. It really was a delicious bit of nature. The metal disc shone like a small sun.

"What a 'tummy'!" she said. Her laughter was contagious. "Just like a baby blackbird's before it has got its feathers. And that big silver disc!—like the family plate on the family chest."

"It's protection from all evil, poor wee mite."

"What a filthy-looking hovel," Millicent said. "Worse than a gipsy-tent in England."

"And yet it's a home," Michael said. "And there are no more passionate lovers of home than these tent-women, or more hospitable people."

"Do these date-trees bear fruit?" Millicent asked the practical question irrelevantly. Her mind was charged with new interests, while her eyes looked at the soaring trees. The tent-dwellers interested her. She would like to have questioned them about all sorts of intimate subjects.

"Rather! These people pay taxes, too."

"Really? Isn't there any spot on the globe where people can just live as they like, where they can get away from income-tax and authorities?"

"I don't know if the Bedouins pay any tent-taxes, but I suppose that if they didn't aspire to owning date-palms, they could live in the arid desert without paying anybody anything. It's the old, old, unchanging subject—water."

Millicent lapsed into silence. Her chin was resting on her hands; she was lying face downwards on the sand. Michael

was resting beside her. Hassan and a few servants they had taken with them to attend to their picnic-lunch were fast asleep. The camels and mules made a picturesque note in the distance. On Millicent's camel a pale blue sheepskin rug covered the fine saddle; it looked like a patch of the heavens dropped down to earth.

"I know what is the most English thing I can think of," she said, "the most English thing compared to all this Easternness—how I adore it, Mike!"

"The English thing you've thought of, or the Easternness?"

"Oh, the Easternness. England's placid and fat and bountiful, but all this throbbing emptiness——?"

"Tell me your English scene," he said. Something in Millicent's eyes drove him into speech. He, too, knew the throbbing silence, the solitude that thunders, the emptiness that is full of passion.

"Well, first look at that tent and at those lazy, straight, brown-limbed women—they are just a bit of nature. Summer and winter, autumn and spring, will never change the scene. Look at that ocean of sand, and the moving heat, passing like a wave over the desert. Take off your blue glasses, Mike, and dare to look at the sun. Face your great God Aton—look Him in the face."

Michael was silent, but he took off his blue glasses. He was no eagle; his eyes shrank from the world of blinding, unlimited light.

"Now visualize a wee robin 'flirting,' as Wells says, across a green English lawn."

The suggestion called up a thousand memories. A cloud of home-sickness dimmed the brightness of the sun. Michael could see a green, green lawn and the figure of his mother busy at her flower-beds; the robin's flirting was growing bolder; it was peeping up into her very face! The smell of moisture came to his nostrils.

"Nothing is more English than an English robin, Mike!

In the autumn, when it comes near the house, what a darling it is—so well-turned-out, so fearless of humans!"

"Nothing," Mike said, "unless it's my mother herself, in her gardening gloves, cutting off the dead heads from the rose-beds."

"But she's Irish!"

"Well, I meant British. When you said things seen in England I visualized *my* robin in Ireland, juicy, green, luscious Ireland!"

"Tell me about Ireland," Millicent said lightly. As she spoke, she made a hole in the sand; she pushed her hand and wrist into it—her gloves were off. She drove it in still further, until her elbow only was above the sand; her arm was buried in the desert.

"Take care of sand-flies," Michael said. Millicent's sleeve was rolled up.

"Are there any here? I've not been troubled with them."

"No, probably not—they are the plague of Upper Egypt."

"They were awful at Assuan. It's awfully hot, Michael!" Millicent referred to the sand. She withdrew her arm. "Give me your hand—just feel it." She pulled up his sleeve and took his hand. She held it in her own and thrust it into the hot, soft sand. With her free hand she pulled up her own sleeve and Michael's so as to allow their arms to sink still further into the sand; they were bare to the elbow. Her wrist and the palm of her hand were pressed close to Michael's. Suddenly her hand ceased boring; she remained still, her soft fingers embracing Michael's. Her eyes sought his. He read their invitation.

"It's only our hands, Michael—let them rest." Her fingers tightened round his as she spoke; her eyes challenged him. At the challenge his pulses leapt, his hand ceased to resist. For two days he had been playing with fire. In the wilderness that surrounded them what waters would quench its leaping flames?

Millicent's soft arm lay with his; it was human and

caressing. Then a fear came to him, born of a sudden intense hatred. She was such a little thing. He could strangle her, crush her to atoms. That was the way to put an end to it all.

The next moment Millicent was alarmed, terribly frightened. She was in Michael's arms. He was crushing her, crushing her to atoms. It was not a lover's embrace; it was the mad fury of a roused mystic. Would he crush her until he killed her?

"Don't, Mike, you'll choke me! You are choking me now. Do you want to kill me?"

"I could," he said. "And I'd like to!" He flung her from him on the soft sand. "Go away," he said. "Leave me and my camp for good and all!" His words were broken, mere breathless ejaculations. His eyes made a coward of the reckless woman, but she collected her quick wits.

She lay where he had flung her. She was not hurt or even stunned, but she knew that if she lay there in the position in which he had flung her, presently he would come to her and ask her if he had been too brutal. She traded on his tenderness to women, his horror of inflicting pain.

She lay motionless, the blue sky above her, the yellow sands stretching to the far-off horizon. She had tempted him willingly, deliberately. Something had compelled her to test her power. Her annoyance at his apparent indifference to her presence had become too poignant to hide any longer. Anger was exhausting her nerves. She was conscious that she had burnt her boats, that her tactics were at fault.

Michael did not look at her. He was conscious of nothing in the world but an unbearable contempt for his own manhood. Why had he not driven her away long before this? Why had he silently acquiesced to her companionship?

Despising her as he did, why was she able to lower him in his own eyes? Why did he tolerate her? Why had she any qualities which appealed to him? Why, oh why was

she just what she was? He hated her at the moment, but he hated himself still more. When they got back to the camp he would tell Hassan that their ways must lie apart. And now, at this very instant, he would go and tell her that she must leave; he must have it out with her.

He went to her and stooped over her. "Millicent," he said, "I want to speak to you."

"Yes, Mike."

"Get up and look at me. I want you to listen."

Still Millicent lay perfectly motionless. "I am listening."

He knelt down beside her. "Have I hurt you?"

A little groan was all her answer. Michael turned her face to his. His hands were on her shoulders. She winced.

"Have I hurt you? I am sorry. I was too rough."

Millicent raised herself to her knees. Her face was tense, agonized. She put her hands up to her head and held it. Michael thought he heard a sob. Shame or pain convulsed her body; she rocked herself backwards and forwards.

"I am sorry I was so brutal," he said. "But you deserved it. I had to do it. I always have to be unkind—you are so foolish."

Still Millicent wept. She removed her hands and gazed at him with wet, mournful eyes. Michael put his arm round her and tried to raise her.

"You were very naughty—why were you so naughty?"

One of his arms was supporting her as she struggled to her feet. The next instant Millicent swung herself nimbly round and flung herself on his breast. He was helpless. Her hands were clasped behind his head.

"You wanted to kill me, Mike." Her fingers slipped round his throat. "And now I should like to kill you, yes, kill you! Strangle you and leave your austere, ascetic body for the vultures to enjoy!"

Mike tried to shake her off, to unclasp her hands. She was as strong as a young leopard.

"I would," she said. "For I hate you and despise you!"

"Then leave me," he said. "I wish to God you would!"

"Ah, but I won't!" The cry came from Millicent savagely. "I won't leave you, not until my will has subjected yours! Before I leave your camp you will have been my lover—mystic, æsthetic, dreamer, drifter!"

"Never!" Michael said. "Never, never that!"

Still Millicent clung to him. Her angry words blew her hot breath over his cheeks.

"You are not altogether the ascetic or the saint you appear to be. You have scorned my love. I will break your will. I will humble you in your own fine estimation of yourself. When I take it into my head to do a thing, I generally accomplish it."

Michael disengaged her hands with a tremendous wrench. If he hurt her thumbs he could not help it. He held her from him at arm's length and shook her, shook her as though she was a naughty child in a paroxysm of passion which had to be subdued by extreme severity.

"You little devil!" he said. "You'll leave my camp at once, this very day! I've had more than enough of you!"

Millicent's eyes, as unflinching as Michael's, laughed triumphantly.

"What about my food and medicine for your sick man, your valuable guide to the hidden treasure? You can't afford to let him slip through your hands!"

Michael's eyes dropped. He had allowed Millicent to remain unquestioned, even willingly, as a member of his expedition, since the sick man was in need of the delicate food and medicine her equipment contained.

As his eyes dropped, he asked her what she knew about the hidden treasure. He had only told her about the tomb of Akhnaton; he had particularly refrained from mentioning the Pharaoh's hidden store.

"How did I get to know all I wanted to know?" She glanced at him tauntingly. "It wasn't quite all my love for you, dear man! Perhaps I, too, wished to pick up some of the jewels in King Solomon's Mines!"

"I never mentioned them to you—what do you know about them?"

"What about the precious jewel in the saint's ear—the oriental amethyst, the ninth jewel in the high priest's breast-plate, as mentioned in Exodus, 'and the third row a ligure, an agate, and an amethyst'?" Millicent trilled off the text laughingly.

"You have stooped to spying," he said. "You have an eavesdropper in your camp?"

" 'Verily those who do deeds of real goodness shall drink of a cup tempered with camphor'! Well, is it tempered enough, Michael?" She laughed mockingly, derisively. "Was the deed pure goodness? Was this fanatic not the 'favoured of God' who was to lead you to Akhnaton's treasure?"

"Go!" he cried. "I have heard enough!"

"And take all my provisions and medicines with me!"

"We must do the best we can for him without your luxuries, if you have no mercy, no heart for the suffering."

"And how are you going to get rid of me?"

"You are going. I don't know how, but you're going."

"What if I refuse to go?"

"You won't."

Millicent laughed.

"You won't," he repeated. "You must go. You can't stay."

"And why?"

"Because. . . ." Michael hesitated. "Because . . . you know . . . you know why . . . you know, what you have just said."

"Because you are afraid you will end by being my lover?"

"No. Because I wish to be free of spies and hindrances."

"Then I do hinder? You know my spying has not hurt you!" Her eyes glowed.

Michael gazed sternly into them. He never lied. With him the truth was instinctive, masterful; it was the keynote of his religion. "Yes," he said. "You are a spiritual hind-

rance. I am a human man—you are a sensual woman. You have determined to do everything in your power to keep me ever mindful of the fact. Because I love Margaret Lampton and I do not love you, you have determined to make me unworthy of her, you have trapped me and tricked me and followed me into the wilderness."

"You must admit I managed that part of the job very neatly." Millicent's words were brave, but a little fear had crept into her heart. Michael was in no mood for trifling. Her game was lost.

"How did you do it?" he said. His hands tightened; they held her shoulders. The gentle æsthetic was a furious Celt. He wished that it was a man with whom he was dealing.

Still Millicent was brave, her voice scornful. "*Baksheesh*—the moving finger in the East."

"You contemptible creature!" he said. "Who did you pay?"

"That would be telling."

"I know it would," he said. "And you are going to tell me." He held her with painful firmness.

Millicent's courage gave way. Michael's eyes alarmed her. Something in them warned her that, once roused, he was a dangerous man to trifle with. There is not an immeasurable distance between the mystic and the madman. The pressure of his fingers on her shoulders warned her of his strength; his thumb was like a turnscrew.

"Who did you pay?" he asked. "Tell me, or you will regret it." His grasp became an agony.

"Mohammed Ali," Millicent murmured. "He showed me Margaret's diary."

Michael groaned. "You little beast!" he cried. "You mean little beast!"

Millicent burst into a flood of weeping. She knew that it was her only chance, a woman's deadliest weapon with such a man. "I loved you so! Oh, Mike, I loved you so! Can't you understand? Is there no humanity in you? Is your

nature so devoid of passion, of human love, that you can't understand the mad heights and the depths it can lead you to? I have never been given the chance of rising to the heights."

Mike heard her sobs. He saw her beautiful body convulsed with anguish. The real woman was there at his feet, a weak creature, whose love for himself had driven her to do these deeds he despised. He felt that he was in a manner to blame; for him she had sunk to this degradation.

"I am so ashamed, Mike, but for days my shame has been drowned in anger. I followed you and trapped you and spied upon you." She looked up pleadingly. "And I'd do it all over again, even worse, Mike, I know I would, even though I am despicable in my own eyes."

"Don't!" he said. "It has become a madness with you, an obsession."

"Love is a madness," she said. "It is an obsession. It is devouring me. No one can judge of its power until they have felt it."

He sat down beside her. "Millicent," he said gently, "have you ever thought of praying, of asking for help?" He paused. "You poor, poor soul, have you ever in your life tried to reach your higher self, to get away from all this?"

"No, never." The words came frankly. "First let me enjoy this human love, Michael." Her eyes pleaded. "Then I may try to be as you are, but not till then."

"It would be no enjoyment," he said. "Only a hideous mockery, a wilful lowering of your better self."

"Not of my better self, Mike—not really. I might rise to higher things afterwards, with that one beautiful memory to help me, an Eden in the desert." Her voice was humble; her eyes swam with tears—a beautiful Magdalen.

"Poor little soul!" he said. "Poor little Millicent!"

"Yes, Mike, poor little soul, poor lonely soul!"

"I wish I could do something to help you, show you that

there is a higher, stronger support than any poor love of mine."

"But I don't want it—at least, not now. It doesn't appeal to me. I don't want it, for if I tried to be better, I'd have to try to kill my desire for you, and even if it gives me no happiness, I'd rather have it than kill it. I couldn't relinquish it. It would be giving up the only thing I have of you—my poor, unwanted wanting of you."

"What can I say? What can I do?" Michael was in despair. "How can I help you?"

This humble, tearful Millicent made him wretched. He felt guilty and unkind. He was the innocent cause of her unhappiness. It was not possible to be human and remain untouched by her passion for himself. Yet he knew that he must not allow her to know that, or how his heart ached for her. Her spiritual loneliness horrified him. She had absolutely nothing to turn to, nothing to rely upon. Her religious observances were mere conventional occupations. And yet mixed up in the woman there was a mental quality very rare and sympathetic, a strange fitful brilliance, extremely pleasing. Once or twice on their journey she had expressed the peculiar quality of the scenery in words which were not far off prose poems. It had puzzled him to know how her intellectual refinement could dwell in the same temple as her low characteristics.

"I don't know, Mike." Her voice was very gentle. "I don't see how you can help me."

"I can pray," he said. "I will pray. Perhaps that is where I have been to blame. I have left you out of my prayers."

Millicent looked at him. Her eyes questioned.

"I have thought only of myself, my own safety, the keeping of my thoughts pure and true to Meg, my fight for self-control."

"Oh, Mike!" Millicent's voice was crushed, envious.

"I should have tried to help you as well. We can all help each other by prayers and thoughts and beliefs, belief in

the kingdom of God which is in us. I behaved as if you were not divine, Millicent."

"I'm not. How can I be divine? I am absolutely worldly—I've no wish for your divine love!"

"Divinity is in you," he said. "It is yours, you cannot get away from it." He paused. "You were ashamed just now—that was the light which cannot be put out. Now, every day, I will try to be less selfish, I will pray for you. Prayer will help to bring you into the light. Soon you will begin to peep into the kingdom of God which is in you. You will see how wonderful it is. Love will hold out its arms to you from every passing cloud, from every corner of the wilderness. I am to blame, for I only tried to banish you, instead of helping you. I must begin to-day. We must all help each other by our thoughts as well as by our actions. Do you understand? I, who ought to have known better, have failed."

Millicent took his hand and raised it to her lips. "Why should God have so blessed Margaret Lampton?" she said. "She is your 'guarded lady,' as Hassan would say."

"When you know her better, you will see that it is not Meg, but I, who have been blessed, I who have reason to be thankful. Margaret's thoughts constantly reach me; they have helped me over and over again."

"Will you forgive me, Mike?"

"Of course I will," he said. "Else how could I help you?"

"It's your very goodness I love, Michael. I realize that. And yet how horribly I have tried to spoil it!"

"We are going to start afresh, we understand each other." He looked at her with sincere eyes. "Isn't that so? Do you want me for your friend, Millicent?"

"More than anything in the world . . . except . . ." she paused. " . . . except . . ."

His eyes held hers; they became stern. "We have settled all that. You know now that it can never be, and if I am

to be your friend, you must forget all that you have ever said."

"Yes, yes—the crumbs, Mike, they are sweeter than nothing."

"My help," he said, "and sympathy—that is what I can give you."

"And may I remain in your camp for a little while?"

"No." His voice was firm. "We must part. But that will make no difference. I will help you, I promise. I can help you as Margaret helps me."

Millicent made no demur. It was useless. "Will the saint be well enough to travel to-morrow, do you think?"

"I don't know. His headache was better this morning. If he can retain some food, he may soon pick up."

"And you will go on to Akhnaton's tomb?" Millicent did not refer to the buried treasure.

"Whenever he is better." Michael looked at his watch. "We had better be going back," he said. "I want to make preparations."

"And I am to return to civilization?"

Michael did not answer. He called Hassan. "We are ready, Hassan," he said.

In a short time they were off.

Before mounting her camel Millicent said: "Thank you, Michael. I don't deserve your kindness."

On their homeward journey Michael's heart held many a prayer. He was no longer merely to turn this woman out of his thoughts, to thrust her behind him, a thing of Satan. He was to help her. He was to help her until such a time as she could help herself. He was to bring her mind to the consciousness of the truth. He was to reveal to her, by his prayers, what Akhnaton taught his people—that God is happiness, God is beauty, God is Love.

## CHAPTER VI

It was close upon sundown when Michael and Millicent got back to the camp. Abdul had come a little way to meet them. To an observant eye, the calm of his Eastern countenance showed some anxiety. Millicent did not see it. Michael was riding on ahead when Abdul met him. Abdul turned his mule and rode by his master's side.

"You have something to tell me, Abdul?"

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, I have something to tell you."

They increased the space between themselves and the camels which were following them in Indian file. Abdul spoke in Arabic, as he always did to his master. When he had confided his secret to Michael he lapsed into silence. The Effendi looked very grave. The news was far from pleasant.

"You need not tell Madam," Michael said. "Not until you are quite sure, Abdul. It will only alarm her."

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, I gave it to your ears alone."

"How is he?" Michael referred to the saint.

"His temperature has fallen—head no longer aches. That is always the case."

"You have done all that is necessary?"

"All I could do, Effendi. Madam has good medicines, praise be to Allah! We can be hopeful."

They rode on to the camp in silence. Michael's thoughts were busy. What would Millicent say? Would she be afraid? The idea was not pleasant.

When they had dismounted Michael went at once to see the saint and Millicent hurried off to her tent to change her dusty garments for daintier ones. She was still penitent and half-ashamed. Who knows but that Michael's efforts to help her were already beginning to bear fruit? If thoughts can purify, Millicent's heart should have been

as fair as a white lotus flower whose roots are in the mud. Michael's thoughts had baptized it.

When she had tidied up and was beautifully fresh in her snow-white muslin frock, she went outside and waited for the dinner-gong to sound. Even that item of civilization had not been forgotten—it is true it was only a drum, an earthen *darabukkeh*, but it filled its purpose well. Its dull thud, thud, had scarcely ceased vibrating the air when Michael appeared. As he came towards her, Millicent went to meet him. He had not yet changed his day clothes.

"Don't come near me!" he called out. "Not any further."

"Why not?" Millicent said. "What's the matter? Are you stricken with the plague?" She spoke laughingly.

Michael stopped within a few feet of her. "Perhaps I am stricken with the smallpox," he said. "The saint has got it—it may be of a very malignant order. We don't know."

Every vestige of colour left Millicent's face. She felt sick. "And you have been to him? You touched him!"

"Of course. I wished to judge for myself. There is no doubt about it."

"M-i-c-h-a-e-l!" The word was a long-drawn-out expression of horror. A wave of inexpressible terror and disgust overwhelmed Millicent; she could scarcely speak or move. "You knew, and yet you went to him. How could you, oh, how could you?"

He scarcely heard her. "These natives who have never been vaccinated take it very badly. Smallpox is a scourge with all Africans, from the north to the south."

Millicent's mind was now working furiously. She did not wish to let Michael see how horrified she was, or how angry.

"Go and change," she said. "Go at once. Get Abdul to disinfect you—I brought any amount of stuffs."

"Oh, I'm all right—I'm not afraid. I was with him for a long time last night. If I'm going to take it, the mischief's done."

Millicent's quick mind travelled. Michael had been with this sick saint the night before. He, Michael, might be a carrier of the disease, even if he were immune from it himself. And she had been fool enough to throw herself into his arms! Oh, what a fool! She might even now be incubating the horrible, loathsome disease. She was soul-sick. Her fear and rage were inseparable. But she must, of course, make a good show.

"Never mind, Mike, about last night. Probably the disease was not at such an infectious stage as it is now—you may not have contracted it. Take what precautions you can—go quickly and disinfect yourself. Are you really sure it's smallpox?" She said the last words with a shudder. "Ugh! it's horrible!"

"Yes," Michael said. "The spots have appeared on his wrists and at the back of his neck. Abdul knows the beastly disease only too well—the vomiting and the headaches and the fall in the temperature. It appears that he told Abdul that he had been very, very sick for some days before we met him. But malaria might have accounted for the sickness—and the headaches. No one could have diagnosed it until the spots appeared. Abdul's not to blame."

"What are you going to do?" Millicent said. "Stick to him? I suppose you will!" she shivered.

"I will isolate his tent. I can't go on and leave him here, if you mean that."

"Oh, you're crazy! Think of Margaret, if you won't think of yourself!"

"She wouldn't have me do it."

"Leave one or two of the men behind with him. It's absurd, running such a risk. He will probably die, in any case."

"When I needed his help I meant to stick to him. When he now needs mine, am I to desert him? You said my goodness was not disinterested. It was not, but I can't stoop to that."

"If these Moslems really think he's a saint, they'll nurse him faithfully. I'll pay them what they ask—anything."

"Money isn't everything, Millicent—surely you know that?"

"It can do a great deal. If you hadn't met him, he'd have died."

"But I have met him. Doesn't that show that I am entrusted with his welfare?"

"A chance meeting."

"That absurd word! By chance you mean such a big thing that your mind can't imagine it! You choose to call a link in the Divine Chain chance! the Chance which gives life, the Master of that which is ordained, you mean?"

"You can't nurse him, you can't do anything more for him than see that he has all that he wants. 'The faithful' will carry out your instructions. Do be practical, reasonable."

"It's no use, Millicent, I can't leave him. I won't." Michael shivered. "It's chilly. Let's go and eat our dinner."

"You must change first—I insist. It's only right to others."

"Then don't wait for me."

"Oh yes, I will. Only be quick." Millicent knew that she was too sick with fear to eat and enjoy the excellent dinner which had been prepared for them. As she waited for Michael, she cursed her own folly, her own abominable bad luck. If Michael was a carrier, she had no chance, unless she was one of those rare people who are immune from the disease. She did not think she was, because when she was last vaccinated, when she was fifteen, she had been very, very ill and sick. She felt physically tired, for her brain was quick. It was imagining horrible things. She was visualizing her own beauty spoilt, her fair skin deeply pitted with pock-marks, her colour all gone. The disease would take the glitter from her hair, the glow from her personality. She knew the result of smallpox. She saw

herself, a little, washed-out, yellow-skinned woman, with weak eyes and drab-coloured hair.

Oh, why had she ever called Michael's attention to the saint? If he had not gone to his rescue, he would have died where he fell, bathed in the blood-red light of the afterglow. Why had Michael been such a fool as to touch him and nurse him? Had she not warned him that the fanatic was filthy and probably infectious? And, to make matters still worse, to leave no room for chance, she had of her own will flung herself into Michael's arms! Her determination to subject his will to hers, to triumph over Margaret, had brought her to this! Michael was further from her than ever. She had disgusted him; his only thought of her now was his desire to make her as religious as himself. She had to admit her defeat.

And this was how it had ended! Michael, the mystic, the quixotic idiot, had taken into his camp a creature sick with smallpox, and she, Millicent, had probably contracted it by her act of rashness! The desert seemed scarcely large enough to hold her anger. It stifled and exhausted her.

During dinner very little was spoken between the two, for Millicent was devastated by her own terrors and Michael was making plans for the sick man's isolation. His tent must remain where it was, while Michael's own, and the servants', except those inhabited by the men who wished to nurse the saint, must be moved to a safe distance. Millicent's going was driven from his mind.

Millicent was thankful that Michael did not notice how little she ate at dinner. The servant did; nothing passes a native's eye. He knew the woman's terror.

Soon after their coffee was served they separated, Millicent going to her own tent and Michael to consult with Abdul. When Millicent reached her tent and managed to compose her mind, she sent for Hassan. Half an hour later he left her. He had much to do. The *Sitt's* orders were comprehensive.

. . . . .

Michael went early to bed. He was very tired. At about two o'clock in the morning he stirred in his sleep. Was he hearing the distant sound of camels roaring, or was he dreaming? He was too lazy to find out. If there were jackals prowling about, the night-guards would see to them. Undoubtedly something had disturbed him, for as a rule he slept without moving the long night through.

Conscious of feeling deliciously sleepy and totally indifferent to anything but his own comfort, he soon fell asleep again. In his dreams he heard again the liquid sound of bells—mule bells and camel bells—growing fainter and fainter as the animals travelled into the distance.

. . . . .

In the morning, when he awoke, it was with a new lightness of spirit and refreshed vitality. A sense of freedom exalted him, a subconscious freedom, which had been absent for some days. The glory of the desert called to him. He felt spiritually and physically vitalized.

Even the recollection of the nature of the saint's illness did not damp his spirits. He would recover with careful nursing, and when he was better they would go on their way rejoicing. The Promised Land seemed nearer.

It was scarcely time for his early cup of tea, yet he saw Abdul bringing it. Perhaps the joy of life had waked him, too, perhaps he also was eager to get up and greet the morn. What a wonderful morning it was! All pure, cool, clear sunlight. Michael's heart, a throbbing organ of praise, sent forth a pæan to the pagan skies.

"Is the Effendi awake? May his servant enter?"

"Yes, Abdul, come in."

Abdul entered with the noiseless movements of his race. As he stood by his master's bed, Michael saw that the unemotional native was attempting to hide his anger. Something had greatly upset him.

"What is it, Abdul? Has anyone been unkind to the saint?"

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, it is not that." Abdul spoke lengthily

and in the correct Arabic fashion. He must not approach the subject too quickly.

"Tell me," Michael said. "What troubles you, Abdul?"

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, the honourable *Sitt* has left you. She has gone—there is no trace of her camp."

"What?" Michael jumped out of bed. "The *Sitt* has gone? No sign of her camp?"

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, that is so. Your servant offers his apologies for bringing you bad news."

To Abdul's eternal amazement, Michael burst into a roar of laughter, hearty, unsuppressed enjoyment of a good joke.

"Gone?" he repeated. "The *Sitt* has gone, made a moonlight flitting? The little devil!"

Abdul's mystification was so complete that he could only salaam.

"The little coward!" Michael said. "The miserable little coward!"

He spoke so rapidly, and in English, that Abdul could not fully understand. Indeed, he was totally at a loss to comprehend anything of the situation. It baffled him. His master actually seemed pleased and highly amused at the cowardly conduct of his mistress!

"When did the *Sitt* leave the camp, Abdul?"

"At about two o'clock this morning, Effendi. She has taken everything with her." He threw up his hands. "Her medicines, her delicate food, everything we need for the saint."

"Curse her!" Michael said. "What a dirty trick!"

"The *Sitt* was very much afraid, Effendi."

"Well, perhaps that was quite natural, Abdul. But to take everything away! What shall we do without her tins of milk, her medicine-chest?"

"*Insha Allah*, we will save the 'favoured of God,' Effendi. There in the Bedouin camp they will give us milk —they have goats."

"How is he this morning?"

"The Answerer of Prayer has heard the cry of His children. He has again bestowed upon us His everlasting mercy, His compassion is infinite."

"The saint is better?"

"The malady is running its course. *Insha Allah*, it will do so without any complications. The pox now appears on his back and body. The condition of the saint's general health is not such as to cause any undue anxiety to the Effendi."

"Is he conscious?"

"His thoughts are in heaven, but his mind is clearer, praise be to Allah."

"And the *Sitt*?" Michael said. "How did she get away?"

"She gave minute instructions to Hassan early in the evening." Abdul salaamed. "*Aiwah*, honourable Effendi, you will be relieved of a double anxiety—the *Sitt* was greatly afraid."

"Yes, Abdul, I'm thankful, very thankful." Michael stretched out his arms and breathed a deep breath of freedom. Thank God she had gone, gone of her own free will! This, then, was the meaning of his sense of liberation. The white tent was there no longer. It had vanished.

Then he remembered having stirred in his sleep. The bells he had heard were the bells on the animals which were carrying the frightened Millicent. Her *hijrah* had not been achieved without affecting his subconscious mind.

Meanwhile, Abdul was studying his master's mind. He was reading his thoughts as one reads a story from the illustrations of a book. He saw relief and freedom—and, above all, thankfulness. His master's besetting sin was his dislike of scenes, his hypersensitiveness in the matter of causing pain to others, the desire to surround himself with happiness.

"*Gehenna* to the harlot!" he said to himself. "*Insha Allah*, she will regret last night's work, even though it may benefit the Effendi!"

"You will be lonely, Effendi," he said. "But without the honourable *Sitt* your work will progress. Women are a hindrance to men's minds, an anxiety."

"I am well pleased, Abdul. We were not lonely before Madam came."

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, there was the prospect of the meeting with the honourable *Sitt*. Now there is desolation."

"I did not seek the meeting, Abdul. All is well."

"*Insha Allah*, things will progress more favourably."

Abdul left his master. He had learned all that he wanted to know. The Effendi did not love the harlot. He knew now that the woman had followed Michael, and that she had got wind of the hidden treasure.

When he was alone, he gazed at the shrunken encampment. The white tent was there no longer; the place was rid of the woman and her luxuries. Had she decamped with two ends in view—to get away from the infected spot and to anticipate the Effendi in his search?

"*Gehenna!*" he said again. "I did not tell the honourable Effendi that the linen sheets in which the saint slept last night belonged to the *Sitt*—that they are packed with her clothes which she will wear again! She has made her own bed—let her sleep in it. Hassan will see to that."

The distance of the flat desert had obliterated Millicent's cavalcade. Was it journeying towards civilization, hurrying from the plague-spot in the desert, or was it going to the hills behind Akhnaton's city?

When Michael had hurried to the saint the night before and had shown himself totally fearless and unmindful of his own welfare, the saint had implored him to leave him. He knew the danger and the awfulness of smallpox; he knew the risk the Englishman was running.

When Michael made him understand that he had no intention of leaving him, that he was going to wait for him until he was better, the sick man was overwhelmed with gratitude. He told Michael that he would show him, if Allah permitted, the place in the hills where the hidden

treasure lay. But in case it should please the Giver of Death to allow His servant to look upon the beauty of His face (which was the sick man's way of saying in case he should die), he would beg of the Effendi to listen to what he had to tell him.

"While my memory is clear, while the All-Merciful permits me to speak to the Effendi, I will instruct him, the treasure shall be his."

Had the saint's instructions been passed on to Millicent's ears? Were her fast-moving camels bearing her to the crocks of fine gold and the wealth of jewels which the hermit of el-Azhar had visualized?

The fate of every man hangs round his neck. If Allah had willed it?

## CHAPTER VII

THE saint was dead. At dawn his soul had passed into *Barzakh*, or the second world, the intermediate state between the present life and the resurrection.

While administering to him, Abdul's anxious ears heard the ominous rattle in the dying man's throat, he turned his face Mecca-wards and reverently closed his eyes. At the same moment the faithful who had gathered round him—among whom were some of the inhabitants of the Bedouin village, for the presence of the hermit-saint in the foreigner's camp was known—in one voice acclaimed ecstatically:

"Allah! Allah! There is no strength nor power but in God. To God we belong, to Him we must return! God have mercy on him. *La ilaha illallah.*"

His death had taken place one hour before sunrise; it was now one hour before sunset and Michael was sitting on a little knoll in the desert, watching the mourners return from the funeral of the holy man. It was a very simple affair, far different from the splendid ceremony which

would have been accorded him if he had died near a city or of a less contagious malady. There were no hired mourners, no fine trappings on the bier, no wild women whose quavering "joy-cries" (*zaghareet*) rent the air with their shrill voices.

The little procession which followed the emaciated corpse to its last resting-place in God's wide acre of sand and sky was composed of sincere mourners. The corpse had been wrapped in white muslin and enclosed in a white linen bag. When devout pilgrims or pious Moslems go on a lengthy journey, they usually carry their grave-cloths with them. The saint had not provided himself with even his shroud. As a favoured of God, the clothes in which he would be buried would be forthcoming; he took no thought for the morrow. All his life, by Allah's guidance, men had provided for his simple wants. A hermit-saint is never without his devotees. As a *welee* he was worthy of a costly funeral, but the nature of his death demanded immediate burial. His fame would follow after. Michael knew that probably some day a white tomb, like a miniature mosque, would mark the spot where his bones had been laid to rest. And to that tomb, a conspicuous object in the flat desert, with its white dome silhouetted against the deep blue sky, devout pilgrims would travel for many generations.

Michael had not attended the funeral. He had consulted Abdul and they had come to the conclusion that it would be wiser for him, as a professing Christian, not to be present at the actual religious ceremony. From a raised spot in the desert he had seen all that had taken place. In accordance with Moslem superstition, the funeral had been before sunset. All Moslems dislike a dead body remaining in the house overnight; it is always, when circumstances permit, buried in the evening of the day on which death has taken place.

Abdul had told Michael that the dead man would, in all probability, guide the bearers to the exact spot where they were to bury him; if they were going in the wrong direction

he would impel them to stop. Michael had watched with interest to see if this would take place, if the bearers halted or altered their course. Evidently the saint was pleased with the spot they had selected, for they journeyed on unhaltingly until they were lost to sight.

And now the little procession was returning, in the fading sunlight. The holy man's emaciated frame, enclosed in its white bag, lay under the golden sand of the eastern desert.

This desert burial seemed to Michael a very simple and beautiful method of disposing of the dead. The dull chanting of the mourners had lent an emotional note to the scene. It was a sad little incident, but one totally free from the ordinary melancholy which attends a Western burial. For a Moslem, death has little horror. A pilgrim in the desert, when he knows that his death is approaching, either from fatigue or exhaustion or some disease, will dig his own grave and lay himself down in it, covering his body up to his neck with sand. There he will quietly, with Eastern philosophy, await his end. He knows that the four winds will bring drifting sand to the spot where his body lies; it will gather and gather, as it does against any excrescence, until his body is well covered. In the desert many are the ships that pass in the night.

The saint had been in Michael's camp for a fortnight and during that time no other member of the party had developed smallpox. Michael was in blissful ignorance of the fact that the servant whom he had sent back to Freddy Lampton's hut in the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings, bearing a letter to Margaret, in which he had told her everything that had happened—not omitting Millicent's visit and her sudden departure—had never even reached Luxor. He had fallen sick by the way and had died of smallpox in a desert village. He alone of the whole party had contracted the disease. The letter which he carried was burned by the *sheikh* of the village, a wise and cautious man, who had been called in to give his advice as to the

treatment of the infectious traveller. A *sheikh's* duties are many and varied; he is indeed the father of his village. The traveller had, of course, gone to the hotel or rest-house for travellers in the village, where he was entitled to one night's rest and food.

It was during the long, anxious days when the saint hovered between life and death that the true hospitality of the Bedouin camp was put to the test. And it was not wanting; whatever was theirs to give they gave with a beautiful hospitality. It was to them a pleasure and satisfaction; Allah be praised that they were able to render any service to the holy man and to help the stranger who had shown him so great an act of charity. Eggs and milk and the flesh of young kids they had in abundance, and these offerings they sent to the camp in such quantities that Michael felt embarrassed and overwhelmed. Michael knew that they are not a devout people, but in this instance their instinctive hospitality, stimulated by their superstitions, served in place of blind obedience to the teachings of the Koran, in which the rules set forth on the subject of charity are splendid and far-reaching.

The little figure with the silver disc and the protruding "tummy" had become quite a familiar sight in his camp; it came and went with the nervous agility of an antelope.

On this evening, as Michael watched the party of mourners drawing nearer and nearer to the camp, he tried to understand their thoughts. He knew that each one of them believed exactly the same thing; their spiritual ideas never strayed one letter from the Koran; their minds had never thought for themselves—it would have been rank heresy so to do. They were as certain now as though they had seen it there that the saint's soul was in *Barzakh*. It had left this, the first world, the world of earning and of the "first creation," the world where man earns his reward for the good or bad deeds which he has done. In *Barzakh* the saint would have a bright and luminous body, for such is the reward of the pious.

Was not this in keeping with the luminous appearance of Meg's vision? Abdul had often told Michael that he himself had seen in this, the "first world," the spirits of both evil and right doers, and that the spirits of the evil-doers were black and smoky, whereas the spirits of the pious were luminous as a full moon.

Michael envied the completeness of their belief, even while he pitied them. They had evolved nothing for themselves; their salvation was merely a matter of obeying the teachings of the Koran unquestioningly. Obedience and surrender were their watchwords. How much better were Akhnaton's "Love and the Companionship of God"! To walk and talk with God, how much more enjoyable, how much more edifying to man's higher self, than the mere obeying of His laws! Even though they prayed, these simple Moslems, five times a day, they never recognized God's voice in the song of the birds; they did not know that it was He Who was singing—the birds were His mediums. In the winds of the desert, heaven's wireless messengers, they caught no messages. What the Koran did not specify did not enter into their religion or spiritual understanding.

Abdul approached his master. The saint was buried and the procession of the faithful had gone to perform their various tasks; it was now time to return to practical matters. Michael was amazed at his cheerful expression. Abdul asked his master if it would suit him to continue their journey the next day. Would he give instructions?

Michael assented. A little of his ardour had vanished. "Yes, Abdul," he said. "I suppose we must be going on our way. It is sad to leave this camp, where we have witnessed such a wonderful example of humility and singleness of purpose. Don't you shrink from leaving him to such utter desolation?"

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, but you know there is joy for us all, not sadness. The beloved ones of God do not die with their physical death, for they have their means of sustenance with them."

"In the second world, Abdul, is your saint already tasting the joys of paradise?"

"*Aiwah*, Effendi. Punishments and rewards are bestowed immediately after death, and those whose proper place is hell are brought to hell, while those who deserve paradise are brought to paradise."

"Then in the third world, what greater rewards are there than the pleasures of paradise? Surely that is infinite happiness?"

"The manifestation of the highest glory of God—that is the supreme reward, Effendi, the meeting of God face to face."

"Then in paradise, in the second world, the saint will not yet see God?"

"*La* Effendi. The day of resurrection is the day of the complete manifestation of God's glory, when everyone shall become perfectly aware of the existence of God. On that day every person shall have a complete and open reward for his actions. He shall actually see God."

Michael's thoughts flew to the vision of Akhnaton. If the luminous state was significant of *Barzakh*, or the second world, perhaps it was only during that period that the spirits were able to return to earth. He was never forgetful of the fact that in Eternity time cannot be measured, yet three thousand years spent in the second world seemed to his human mind a long time of waiting!

They were walking together towards the camp.

"*Aiwah*, Effendi," Abdul said, "to-morrow we depart at dawn?—the weather grows hotter."

"Yes, Abdul, at dawn. I will be ready—never fear."

"Has the Effendi ever allowed himself to think that the honourable *Sitt* who left him two weeks ago may have journeyed to the hidden treasure?"

Michael stared. "No, Abdul, no, I have never thought of such a thing."

"The Effendi has a beautiful mind. The beloved saint,

whom Allah has seen fit to remove from our sight, had a heart no more free from evil."

"But, Abdul. . . ." Michael stopped. His mind was suddenly filled with new thoughts. Abdul's suggestion had opened up a deep chasm of ugly suspicions; his whole being seemed to have fallen into it. Abdul waited.

"Madam was terrified—she was flying from the danger of smallpox. She would think of nothing but of getting safely back to civilization, I feel certain."

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, but the honourable *Sitt* has a woman's soul, and a woman's soul has often been sold for gold and jewels and much fine raiment."

"That is true, Abdul."

Had not Millicent stooped to the lowest means of trapping him and of obtaining the information she desired? If she could do the one deed, why not the other?

But the idea was absurd. She was so totally ignorant of the geography of the desert. She had had no more idea of where she was going than a blind kitten. He reminded Abdul of the fact.

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, but the honourable *Sitt* had a spy in her camp. I have seen him at his work."

"What could he have discovered? You, I know, never discuss my affairs—we have never even talked of them together."

Abdul salaamed. "My master's secrets are his servant's."

"Then how could he find out?"

"Tents have ears, Effendi. The saint's voice was weak, but not too weak for the super-ears of a spy. When the saint told the Effendi, very secretly and minutely, how to find the hidden treasure, on that night when he knew that Allah had decreed his death, Abdul was also playing the part of a spy. He saw the servant of the honourable *Sitt*, he saw his ear, and how it was placed at a little aperture in the sick man's tent."

Michael was silent for a few seconds.

"*Ma lesh!* The Effendi need not trouble too much. I did not tell him—there was nothing to be gained by causing my master unhappiness."

"I am not troubling, Abdul. If it has been so willed that I am to discover Akhnaton's treasure, even the spy of the cleverest woman on earth will not prevent it. I am fatalist enough for that, Abdul!"

"The Effendi is wise. Avarice destroys what the avaricious gathers. Allah will reward the spy according to his merits."

Michael smiled. "I'm afraid it is more my nature than my piety which makes it easy for me to resign myself to the inevitable."

"*Ma lesh!* The Effendi understates his obedience to God's will—there is much good in patiently tolerating what you dislike."

"There's another way of expressing the same thing, Abdul—Effendi Lampton calls it 'drifting.' I am too like the desert sands, he thinks. I am without ambition, I too easily accept what seems to me the deciding finger of fate."

"Content is prosperity, Effendi."

"And we say that God helps those who help themselves."

"*Aiwah.*" Abdul smiled. "Our rendering of the proverb is more beautiful—'God helps us so long as we help each other.' The Effendi showed much charity—he helps others rather than himself."

"My help was unworthy of mention, the merest human sympathy for the helpless and suffering. Who could have done less?"

"We consider sympathy the next best thing to a proper belief in God, sympathy for others." Abdul bowed. "The Effendi has much sympathy—he himself is not aware of how much."

"Thank you, Abdul, but I do believe in God. I believe in Him so fully and unreservedly that I often wonder why I am not a good man. Sometimes I am not so bad, or I think I am not, for I am very conscious of Him, He is

very near to me. At other times the world is a wilderness and God is very far."

"We are never far from God, Effendi. We cannot be. He is closer to us than the hairs of our head, there is nothing nearer than God."

"I know that, Abdul, I know it, but yet these lapses come. I feel alone, abandoned, useless, my life purposeless, wasted."

"A man has no choice, Effendi, in settling the aims of his life. He does not enter the world or leave it as he desires. The true aim of his life consists in the knowing and worshipping of God and living for His sake. Our Holy Book says, 'Verily the religion which gives a true knowledge of God and directs in the most excellent way of His worship is Islam. Islam responds to and supplies the demands of human nature, and God has created man after the model of Islam and for Islam. He has willed it that man should devote his faculties to the love, obedience and worship of God, for it is for this reason that Almighty God has granted him faculties which are suited to Islam.' "

Michael listened with reverent attention. He knew that Abdul was conferring a special favour on him in that he was actually quoting the very words of the Holy Koran to a Christian. As a matter of fact, Abdul had ceased to think of Michael as a Christian—from his Moslem point of view, as an enemy of Islam. He rather considered his condition as that of one who was searching for the Light and would eventually enjoy the perfection of Islam. He knew that Michael did not divide the honours of the one and only God; he believed, as Moslems believe, that the Effendi Jesus was not the Son of God, but a prophet to whom God had revealed Himself.

When they parted for the night, Abdul was again the practical servant, the excellent dragoman. By dawn the camp would be on its way to its objective, the hills beyond the outline of the lost "City of the Horizon." Abdul, the visionary and the pious Moslem, was as keen about reaching

Akhnaton's treasure as Pizarro was obsessed with the reports of the wealth of Peru.

For half of that short night Michael tried unsuccessfully to sleep. He needed rest, for it had been a trying and eventful day, beginning with the saint's death and ending with his solemn and picturesque burial.

Sleep was indeed very far from him. His brain was too excited; his nerves were beginning to feel the strain of the dry desert air. The moment he closed his eyes he could see the emaciated frame of the dying saint as he had last seen him, a few hours before his death. He could hear with extraordinary persistence the cries of "Allah! Allah! There is no strength nor power but in God. To God we belong, to Him we must return." The words had never left the desert stillness; the air held them and repeated them time after time.

He could see Abdul reverently pull the eyelids over the death-glazed eyes; he could see the weeping mourners perform the last ceremonies for the dead saint.

Then the scene would change to the one he had watched in the evening—the white figures, with blue scarves of mourning wound round their heads, bearing the saint reverently across the golden sands.

How tender it had all been, how vivid the clear, open light of uninterrupted space and cloudless sky!

And now it was all over. He had met the holy man who was to lead him to the secret spot where the treasure lay; he had heard from his lips the account of how he had accidentally come across the crocks of gold, when he had made for himself a dwelling-place in a cave in the heart of the hills. The crocks were full of blocks of Nubian gold; the jewels were in caskets which had fallen to pieces, even before his eyes, when the winds of the desert had reached them.

Was it all a wonderful dream? Had he really in his possession the crimson amethyst of Oriental beauty, which the saint had carried in his ear? Was it locked in the belt-purse which he wore under his clothes by day and laid un-

der his pillow by night? He put his hand below his pillow and opened the purse; no doubt his fingers would feel the jewel. But what was there to tell him that it was really there, that he was not the victim of some strange hallucination? Thoughts were things. Had he thought about this treasure until it had become to him an actual reality?

Then vision after vision was forced upon his sight—Millicent in her varying moods, the saint's ecstasies, the now familiar figures of the Bedouin, bearing their offerings to the sick man, their polite and beautiful expressions as they laid the eggs and milk at his feet. He got so tired of the visualizing and recitation of all that he had seen and heard during the days which he had spent in anxious uncertainty that he could endure it no longer.

He got up and lit his candle; things would seem more real in the light. He stretched out his hand for the book which always lay near his bed. *The Open Road*, his Bible and this little volume of selected verse constituted his desert library. He wanted a poem which would completely transfer his thoughts from the throbbing present, which would change the arid desert and limitless space into green England, with its enclosing hedges and leafy woods. His nerves were jaded; they needed the relaxation of moderation. Knowing almost every poem in the volume, he quickly found Bliss Carman's "Ode to the Daisies." His mind recited it even before his eyes saw the words:

"Over the shoulders and slopes to the dune
I saw the white daisies go down to the sea,
A host in the sunshine, an army in June,
The people God sends us to set our hearts free."

He read the next verse and then turned to Wordsworth's immortal lines:

"I wandered lonely as a cloud . . ."

He read the poem through, although he knew each dear, familiar word of it. Reading it helped his powers of concentration. It was amazing how quickly the suggestion of the words soothed him. As clearly as he had seen all the

events of the day repeating themselves, he now saw the host of golden daffodils,

"Beside the lake, beneath the trees."

They obliterated the desert, with its immortal voices, its passionate appeals. He was no longer wandering lonely as a cloud. He was happy, he was one with the dancing daffodils, as he watched them

"Tossing their heads in sprightly dance."

To how many weary minds has the poem brought the same solace, the same spiritual refreshment?

"Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze."

His fingers relaxed their hold on the book. It dropped from his hand. Margaret stood among the daffodils, Margaret, with her steadfast eyes and dark-brown head, Margaret calling to him in the breeze.

. . . . . .

At dawn, when Abdul came to wake his master, he found the candle still burning. It was a little bit of wick floating in melted grease, like a light in a saint's tomb. The book which the Effendi had been reading had fallen to the floor.

Abdul looked at his master anxiously. He must have been reading very late. Why had he not been asleep? He ought to have refreshed himself for his long journey. For many days past he had looked tired and anxious.

Abdul folded his hands while he looked at the sleeping Michael.

"*Al hamdu lillah* (thank God)," he said. "The Effendi has been in pleasant company."

## CHAPTER VIII

THE camp had moved on. Two days had passed since the saint had been laid to rest. They were now making for a rock-village, which would take them slightly out of their direct route, but from Abdul's account of the place Michael thought that the delay would be well worth while. A short extension of their journey could make but little difference to the finding of the treasure.

The village was a subterranean one; its streets and dwelling-houses were cut out of the desert-rock. It had been inhabited by desert people since immemorial times. Obviously its origin had been for secrecy and security. Fugitives had probably made it and lived in it just as the early Christians, during their period of persecution, lived in the catacombs in Rome.

Michael had been far from well for some days past. Abdul was anxious about his health. There had been no fresh cases of smallpox in the camp and Michael's present condition indicated a touch of fever rather than any contagious malady. He often felt sick; he was easily tired and his excellent powers of sleeping had deserted him.

He was troubled about Margaret. He had neither heard from her nor was he certain that she had received any of his letters. During the saint's illness he had written her two letters, which his friends at the Bedouin camp had promised to deliver to the next desert mail-carrier who passed their hamlet. He had sent a runner to the village to which he had told Margaret that she was to write. The runner returned, bearing no letter.

It was consistent with native etiquette that he should pay a visit to the *omdeh* of the subterranean village, which he wished to pass through. Abdul had a slight acquaintance with him and, being more than a little anxious about his

master's health, he thought that Michael's visit to him might prove of value should any serious illness overtake him.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when they arrived at the entrance of the village, an uninviting underground labyrinth, where the sun never penetrated and where men, women and children lived in homes cut out of the virgin rock. It was, of course, necessary to leave their camels and go through the village on foot. Abdul told the servants that he alone would go with his master; they were to meet them in the desert at the other entrance to the village.

As Michael followed the tall figure of Abdul through the narrow streets, which were as dark as railway tunnels, he felt horribly sick. He was well accustomed to the torment of Egyptian flies, but these particular flies belonged to the order of things whose deeds, being evil, loved darkness. They covered his face and hands the very moment after he had shaken them off. Do what he would, he could not keep them away from the corners of his mouth or from going up his nostrils.

"Abdul," he said, "this gives one a new vision of hell. Look at those disgusting children!" He pointed to the groups of pale mites, with yellow skins and frail bodies, who were playing like puppies in the garbage of the narrow pathway; their faces were covered with large black house-flies—they hung in clusters from their eyes and ears and from the corners of their mouths.

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, but these people will live in no other surroundings. They prefer this darkness, this unwholesome atmosphere."

"And these awful flies?"

"*Aiwah*, Effendi. They seldom go up to see the sky; perhaps they have never sung to the moon."

"To every bird his nest is home, Abdul."

"*Aiwah*, Effendi. But I will take you to the *Omdeh's* house—we shall soon be out of this."

"Is his house amongst these hovels?" Michael pointed

to one particularly dark cavern. Unlike the ordinary desert peoples, the women were veiled; only their dark eyes were visible to the stranger whom they flocked to see. They showed great surprise when Michael spoke to one of the men in fluent Arabic.

At Michael's suggestion that the *Omdeh's* house would be like one of the cave-houses, Abdul had flung back his head. His smile was scornful; a little annoyance was perceptible in his voice.

"*La*, Effendi. The *Omdeh's* house is like a bower in paradise. The Effendi will enjoy a cup of caravan-tea and a long rest in the cool orchard, where water flows and caged birds sing."

"He has an orchard in a cavern like this!" Michael steadied himself by catching hold of Abdul's staff; he had almost fallen over a baby.

"*Aiwah*, Effendi. The *Omdeh* does not live in the rocks, like the bats. His house is just outside the village. He is very rich—he owns many camels and much cotton and he has a date-farm. He is entitled to three wives."

"Very well, Abdul. I put myself in your hands." Michael sighed. "This village makes me feel rather sick—the whole thing is too horrible, too sad—God's blue sky just up above, and His sweet, clean desert sand, and down here this living death, these idle, dirty women, these sickly, fly-covered babies."

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, it is custom." Abdul shrugged his shoulders. "Did the Effendi not say that to every bird his nest is home? These women were born here, their children will grow up here, and they will have their children here. It is their home."

"We must get out of it, Abdul. I can't stand it any longer!" Michael tried to walk faster. "If I had only a fly-switch! I can't keep the beasts out of my mouth—it's disgusting!"

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, I told you it was not a wholesome village. I assured the Effendi it would be wiser for him only

to pay his respects to the *Omdeh* and not to pass through his village." Abdul darted into one of the houses, whose open front was flush with the rock-wall of the street, which was simply a tunnel in a vast rock; he returned with a palm-leaf fan; a half-piastre had purchased it. He fanned his master with it until he saw the colour return to his cheeks. "The Effendi is better?"

"Thank you, Abdul, I am all right. It was only this stifling atmosphere, and I've been feeling a bit off colour for the last few days—my usual powers of sleep have deserted me."

"The Effendi has some trouble on his mind?"

"That is true, Abdul, but the trouble would not be there if I was feeling quite my usual self—I could banish it."

"The Effendi's heart must not be distracted."

"I have received no letters from the Valley, Abdul. What do you think has happened?"

"The Effendi must not ask for things impossible."

"I suppose not, Abdul. When I left the Valley I agreed that I should not expect to receive letters—they were not to write unless there were things taking place which I ought to know, yet my heart is troubled—I have written so often."

"May the Effendi's servant know the cause of his master's unrest? Will he permit two hearts to bear the burden?"

"I should feel at rest if I was certain that the Effendi Lampton had received my letter, if I knew that scandal had not been carried to the hut." Michael paused. "I wished to be the first to tell him that Madam was a member of our camp, that I met her unexpectedly, that fear sent her away. My happiness depended upon his answer, upon his absolute belief in my explanation."

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, Abdul understands. The situation has complications—ill news travels apace."

"I should not like the *Sitt* to hear from other sources that Madam was with us."

"But your letter should have reached the hut by this time, Effendi."

"Has there been time to get an answer? Do you believe my letter reached Effendi Lampton, Abdul?" Michael asked the question interestedly. Had this seer any second knowledge on the subject? Had he the conviction that in the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings there was no misgiving, no fear, that Margaret's heart was undisturbed?

Abdul knew what his master meant, but with his native dislike of giving an unpleasant answer when a pleasant one would serve, he parried the question.

"The honourable *Sitt* has a noble nature, a clean heart. She is not like Madam. The Effendi's thoughts make his own unhappiness, they are not the thoughts of the gracious lady. The thoughts that come from her travel on angel's wings; they gave the Effendi dreams last night."

"You are right, Abdul. Ah, thank goodness!" Michael gave an exclamation of pleasure; he had caught a glint of sunshine, had felt a breath of desert air. The Living Aton was penetrating the rat-pit.

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, that is the exit of the village. The *Omdeh's* house is not far off—in less than five minutes the Effendi will be reposing in his cool *selamlik*, his throat refreshed with caravan tea."

In a native house the *selamlik* is a spacious room or summer-house, set apart for the receiving of guests. To Michael the *Omdeh's selamlik* seemed like a foretaste of paradise. The *Omdeh* was a courteous old gentleman, who played the part of host and government official with a simple dignity and friendly hospitality.

The open front of the *selamlik* faced a beautiful orange orchard; low seats, comfortably cushioned, ran around its three walls. The *Omdeh* sat on his feet on his *mastaba*. His splendid turban and flowing white robes gave him the appearance of a *Kadi* dispensing justice from his throne. Abdul and Michael reclined on the seat which faced him.

They had both been presented with an elaborate fly-switch, whose handles were decorated with bright beads.

The old man was astonished and delighted to find that Michael could speak Arabic. He was an intelligent, well-read man and something of a politician, an ardent supporter of the British rule in Egypt. He was greatly interested in all that Michael could tell him relating to the news from the outer world.

In his turn, he expressed his regret that more trouble was not taken to suppress the secret, seditious, and anti-English propaganda which was being taught and preached in the desert schools and mosques.

"Where they started, no man knows," he said. "Nevertheless, Effendi, their headquarters is 'somewhere.'" He smiled the peculiar smile of the Eastern, so baffling to the Western mind. "The English are without suspicion, Effendi; they trust everyone."

Michael expressed his ignorance as to what he alluded to. Was he referring to the Nationalist Party in Egypt?

"They do not know their worst enemies, Effendi. They tolerate the presence of mischief-makers, who seduce the ignorant. And these strangers are clever, Effendi, they spare no trouble. In the mosques and the schools they are teaching, or causing to be taught, strange and new ideas. No village is too far off for this propaganda to reach. It is well to believe in others as we would be believed in ourselves, Effendi, but England is like the ostrich which buries its head in the sand. I grieve to tell the Effendi these truths."

To Michael the man's words rang with the truth of conviction. They suggested a new danger to British rule in Egypt. And yet he had heard nothing of the unrest to which he alluded while he was in Luxor or in Cairo; it seemed to flourish in the desert. When he questioned the old man, he became as secret as an oyster; what he definitely knew he did not mean to present to every passing stranger.

While they had been talking, Michael had enjoyed count-

less small cups of tea. It was so good and fragrant that he realized that for the first time he had drunk tea as it was meant to be drunk. He understood how greatly it deteriorates by crossing the ocean; this tea had journeyed all the way to the *Omdeh's* house by caravan; it had been brought overland by the old trade-route.

When Michael had rested he began the lengthy preliminaries of saying good-bye. The *Omdeh* would not hear of his going; he invited him to visit his orchard, a beautiful Eden of fruits and exotic flowers, abundantly irrigated by rivulets of clear water. The contrast between this emerald patch, where golden globes of fruit were still hanging from some of the orange-trees, struck Michael as flagrantly cruel. The *Omdeh*, because of his wealth and social position, was living in a cool, well-built house, surrounded by all that was fresh and fair, an ideal home; yet, not a stone's throw from his secluded orchard and cool *selamlik*, were the narrow streets, littered over with filthy children, encrusted with scabs and black with flies! An overwhelming pity for the ignorant, subterranean people, who were content to live like rats in their holes, filled his soul. How could the *Omdeh* permit it? He seemed kind and he knew that he was intelligent. Probably when the poor were in trouble they instinctively came to him; he administered the affairs of the village, no doubt, with scrupulous impartiality. In this ancient and conservative land it was simply a part of his inherited belief and tradition that such extremes would always exist, that the condition of these people was the condition of which they were worthy, that it was no man's business but their own. They were in Allah's hands. If He willed it, He would help them to rise above it. Our wants make us poor—these men and women had no wants; they were not poor.

It was with much difficulty that Michael at last bade his host adieu, an adieu of abounding phraseology and grace of speech. The *Omdeh*, with native hospitality, had tried to persuade his guest to remain with him for some days, or if

he could not do that, to at least do honour to his humble house by spending one night in it. If the honourable Effendi would only remain, he would tell his servant to kill a sheep and have it roasted; he would send for a noted dancer, to beguile the later hours of the evening; he would have his four gazelles brought to the *selamlik* and Michael should see how beautifully they ran and jumped—they were of a very rare species, much admired by all who could appreciate their points.

To all these inducements Michael turned a deaf ear, even to the last, a blind musician, whose *'ood* playing was greatly celebrated. It was not easy to refuse these pressing inducements, which were all put before Michael with the elaborate charm of Arabic speech. It was he who was to confer the pleasure by remaining; it was he who was to be unselfish and bestow so unexpected and great a pleasure on his humble host.

Determined to get on his way that same afternoon, Michael hardened his heart. He told the *Omdeh* that Abdul had arranged that they were to travel to within one day's journey of their destination that same day; their camp would be in readiness. On the following day Abdul and he were to leave the servants in charge of the camp and start out on the last portion of their journey. They were now but one day and a half from the Promised Land.

Michael had agreed with Abdul that their secret must not be divulged, that the servants must remain in ignorance of the real purpose of their tour. They imagined that it was to visit the ancient Pharaoh's tomb.

Just as they were leaving the orchard the *Omdeh* said: "There have been strange rumours afloat, Effendi. Men say that a wealth of buried treasure has been discovered in the hills to which you are travelling. Is it known to you?"

"Indeed?" Michael said evasively. "What sort of treasure? Do the authorities know of it? Who has discovered it?" He managed to speak calmly and without emotion.

The *Omdeh* threw back his head. "It is not worth a wise man's breath inquiring. It is but one of the many foolish fables which travel with the winds." He shrugged his shoulders.

"What started the rumour? Where did it originate? There is generally some fire where there's smoke."

"Where do such things have their birth? It is no easier to discover than the birthchamber of the anti-British propaganda in Egypt, Effendi."

"You do not attach any belief to the rumour?"

"*La*, Effendi. Who would believe that men are standing knee-deep in jewels and precious stones, and that there is enough gold to build three mosques in these hills, so near the village?"

Michael laughed. He remembered the reports which had been spread abroad about the wealth of Freddy's find. One Englishman had heard that Freddy had been wading ankle-deep in priceless scarabs and jewels and gold collars and necklaces.

"You may well laugh, Effendi. The poor and ignorant will believe anything. I must see the jewels first."

Michael wondered what he would say if he showed him the crimson amethyst which had had its second hiding-place in the saint's ear.

"But who is reported to have found this King Solomon's mine?"

"Some poor man, whom no one has seen or spoken to—every man who tells you the fairy-tale has heard it from his trusted friend, from a reliable source. I never believe in these trusted friends, or any reliable source but my own eyes. And even then, with the wise, seeing isn't always believing."

Michael stole an unseen glance at Abdul. His face was as expressionless as a death-mask. The report appeared to him to be beneath contempt. He politely warned his master that the sun was not so high in the heavens; they had many hours to travel.

When they were out of hearing and all the polite goodbyes had been spoken—a proceeding which is always a trying one to the impatient traveller—Michael and Abdul talked together in low accents and in English. What had the *Omdeh's* news really meant?

In Abdul's heart there was little doubt as to who had found it, if there was any truth in the rumour. Even if they divided the wealth of the treasure by a hundred, and made all due allowances for native exaggeration, it still seemed as though the treasure was one of unusual importance.

"Then you believe there is truth in the report that the treasure has been found, Abdul?"

"Who but the spy of Madam could have known of it, Effendi? and certainly this rumour is disturbing."

"Some natives might have hit upon it by accident. Such things have happened before."

"*Aiwah*, Effendi." Abdul smiled his unbelieving, unpleasant smile. "Just at this particular time, after all these thousands of years, the coincidence would indeed be strange."

"Then you believe, Abdul, that Madam has anticipated us? that she has secured the treasure?"

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, I do, if there is any truth in the story. And if there is not, it is very strange that such a rumour should have been started at this moment."

"I agree," Michael said. "And yet something in my heart tells me that Madam has not done the deed."

"The little voice, Effendi, it is always true, it knows. If the little voice counsels, always obey it."

"It tells me, Abdul, that in this one instance Madam is innocent. I agree with you that if the treasure has been found, it is passing strange and points only to one thing. And yet, if I was to lay my hand on the Holy Book and swear my belief, it would not be that she was guilty of this piece of treachery."

"If Madam has not anticipated the Effendi, then the

treasure is intact! The rumour is false. It is strange what wonderful treasures have melted into thin air before this, Effendi. I have known of dealers in *antikas* travelling for days without end, only to find . . . ?" Abdul threw back his head.

"A mare's nest," Michael said. "That is what we call it, Abdul."

"A good expression, Effendi." In Abdul's heart there was anger and chagrin. Had the harlot outwitted them? Was she even now in possession of the jewels and gold which the saint had discovered, which he himself had clearly visualized?

A beatific smile lit up his face. If the woman had lain in the sheets which had made the sick man's bed, not all the jewels of the Orient or the gold of Ophir would now make her hideous face pleasing in the sight of men! What would her emeralds and topazes and cornelians be worth? They would only mock her pox-pitted face!

In Abdul's Moslem heart there was no pity. His eyes visualized and rejoiced in the sight of the treacherous woman's spoilt beauty. She had earned his hatred, and she had had it ever since the moment when she had spoken scornfully of the saint, a hatred which had grown and flourished like the Biblical bay-tree. To despise a Christian—and more especially a Christian woman—was in keeping with his Oriental mind and Moslem training; he despised Millicent not only as a woman and a Christian, but as a harlot. No evil which he could do to her would inflict the least shame upon his own soul. The contemplation of what her misery would be when she discovered that she was sickening for the smallpox afforded him a gratifying pleasure. He had drunk deeply of the cup of hate; it was not tempered with camphor.

. . . . . .

When they pitched their camp that night, Michael felt weary and depressed. A physical lassitude, which he had found it increasingly difficult to fight against for the last

two days, overwhelmed him. He was glad to go to bed and try to sleep. His efforts met with little success; he felt horribly wide awake and acutely conscious of the smallest sound.

When at last sleep came to him, it did little to give him the rest he required, or to restore peace to his nerves, for his dreams were a vivid repetition, horribly exaggerated, of his journey through the subterranean village. He had lost his way; he was wandering through the airless arteries of the village. His body was covered with house-flies; his nose and ears tickled with them; they crawled into the corners of his mouth; scabs had broken out on his face and body. No little child in the street was a more hideous and loathsome object than he felt himself to be.

. . . . . .

No child was ever more pleased to see its mother than Michael was to see Abdul, when he came to wake him and remind him that that same evening they ought to reach the hills, and prove that the *Omdeh's* rumour about the treasure was either false or true. Never for one instant had Abdul doubted the vision; he had never considered the fact that there might never have been any treasure at all. His second sight—his truer sight—had seen it. That was sufficient.

Michael felt strangely disinclined to exert himself to get up and ride from sunrise until sundown. It seemed to him a task which he could never fulfil. But Abdul was obviously full of suppressed excitement. He was eager for his master to bestir himself and show something of his usual enthusiasm and vitality. The *Omdeh's* story had sorely disturbed him.

"I will be ready, Abdul," Michael said. "Make me some strong coffee."

"*Aiwah*, Effendi."

"Very strong, Abdul!"

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, very strong."

## CHAPTER IX

In the Valley where the Pharaohs sleep, below the smiling hills, the heat and the power of the sun were becoming an actual danger. The best working hours were those which began at dawn and terminated at eleven o'clock.

In the early summer, for Egypt knows no spring, as it knows no twilight, the heat compels even the natives to abandon work during the hottest hours of the day. The sun is at its most dangerous point in the sky at three o'clock in the afternoon; at that hour, as the season advances, little exposed work can be done.

One particularly hot afternoon Margaret was waiting for her brother to come to tea. She had always contrived to keep their sitting-room fresh and cool by closing its windows and drawing down wet blinds before the sun got a chance of entering it. The windows were kept open all night. She had tried almost every possible device—and had been very successful—for excluding "the brightness of Aton" from their home.

If the windows were left open after sunrise, an army of flies too great to combat would invade the room, and ten minutes of sunshine would warm the room for the whole day. If the sun never penetrated it and the windows were kept open during the chilly hours of the night, it was always an agreeable and refreshing place to enter after a long spell in the blinding sunlight. It was so essential for Freddy's health that he should have a cool, dark room to rest in, that Margaret gave the subject her best care and unremitting attention.

The dryness of the air in Upper Egypt can hardly be imagined by those who have not experienced it.

Margaret had heard the overseer's whistle; she knew that work was suspended for some hours. A beautiful sense of

order and neatness had been developed out of the mess of debris and broken rocks which had disfigured the site of the tomb, and some new chambers had been cleared and examined.

When Freddy appeared, Margaret asked him a few questions about his work. Had he heard from the experts who were examining the skull and bones of the mummy? Freddy answered her absently and half-heartedly.

"No, not yet—no report has come. Let's have some tea, first, before we talk—my throat's bone dry."

Meg was conscious of some constraint, some anxiety in his manner. Freddy's silence could be very eloquent. She gave him his tea and administered to his wants. For some days he had had a little touch of diarrhœa, the result of a slight cold caught during one of the quick falls of temperature which take place in Upper Egypt. Margaret knew that in Egypt diarrhœa must never be neglected, for it too often leads to dysentery. She made her brother take the proper remedies, a gentle aperient followed by concentrated tincture of camphor, and she had been very careful not to allow him to eat any fatty food or fruit or meat.

Freddy did not take kindly to a diet of arrowroot or rice boiled in milk, adulterated with water. This afternoon he looked tired and out of spirits. Meg wondered if the tiresome complaint had been troubling him again.

As she handed him the bread and butter she said, "Should you eat butter, Freddy? Tell me the truth—are you not feeling so well to-day? Has there been any return of the trouble?"

Freddy looked at her in astonishment. His thoughts were so far removed from his own health. If abstaining from the flesh of animals and the eating of fruit would ease his anxiety, he felt that for the rest of his life, he would never ask for any other food than watery arrowroot.

"I'm perfectly all right. That trouble's quite gone—your care has done the trick. Thanks awfully."

"Then what is it, Freddy?" Meg laid her hand on his arm, her eyes held his. If he attempted to deny the fact that there was something on his mind, she knew that he knew that his eyes could not hide it from her.

"I'm bothered about something, Meg. There's an ugly report going about—I've made up my mind to tell you."

"Report about whom? You?" Meg's eyes showed battle. The Lampton fighting instinct was roused.

"No, I wish it was about me—I'd soon settle it!" Freddy's eyes were still searched by his sister's.

"It's about Michael," she said. She rose from her seat. "I have expected it. I knew it was coming."

"What?" Freddy looked at her in amazement. "You expected it?"

"I felt there was some trouble. I don't know what—I can't even guess—but I felt it was coming." She stood in front of her brother. "Out with it, old boy! Tell me the worst at once. Is he dying? Has he been murdered? I can bear anything except suspense."

"It's something uglier than death, Meg."

"Treachery?"

"Yes, treachery." Freddy thought that Meg meant treachery on her lover's part. She had thought of treachery from enemies. Had some one forestalled Michael with the treasure?

He paused. What could he tell her next?

"Oh, go on!" Meg cried. "For heaven's sake, don't spare me! A woman can stand almost anything, Freddy, anything but uncertainty."

"Can she stand unfaithfulness, Meg, dishonour?" Freddy's eyes dropped. He could not inflict upon himself the pain which Meg's trusting eyes would cause him.

A cry rang through the room. "No, not that, not that! Go on, go on—what more?" As she spoke, she threw up her head. "It's a lie, Freddy, a hideous lie!"

"I'm afraid there must be some truth in the story, Meg." Freddy's voice was terrible. It conveyed his reluctant, yet

absolute, belief that her lover was guilty. Before he had finished speaking, another cry rang through the room. It startled Freddy with its intensity, its rage and independence.

"I tell you it's a lie! It's not true! And what's more, until I hear it from his own lips, I will never believe a word of the scandal."

"Poor old chum!" Freddy tried to comfort her with the assurance of his sympathy.

Meg flashed round upon him. "Don't pity me! Don't dare to pity me! It's all the basest treachery. I'll have no pity. I don't need it!"

Freddy was silent. It was like Meg not to cry or collapse, as most girls would have done. She was fighting splendidly for her man, whose honour was dearer to her than his life. He wished that Michael could have been there to see her, unworthy though he apparently was of such unwavering loyalty.

"What is this report?" she asked. Her cheeks were as white as a blanched almond; her eyes splendidly alight. The excitement of battle vitalized her. Margaret was beautiful in her wrath.

"I have heard it from several sources that Millicent Mervill joined Michael in the desert, that she now forms part of his camp, that she is, in fact, your lover's mistress. I can't have it, chum."

"It's a lie! How can you believe it? A hideous, abominable lie! It's contemptible of you to listen to it, to give it a moment's consideration." She shivered. "Oh, these filthy native tongues!"

"I wish I could think so, Meg."

Meg swung round on him and for a moment he thought she was going to strike him.

"Damn you!" She flashed out the words just as he himself would have said them. "How dare you say so? He is your friend, he has been closer to you than a brother! He has no one to defend his name! You know that he would

kill any man who attempted to slander you behind your back!"

Freddy did not resent her attack. She had done just what he would have done to any man who had reported any slander against her fair name.

"I know it's awfully hard for you to believe it."

"I don't believe it, Freddy, nor do you!"

"I told you I wished I didn't. The evidence is too clear."

"You haven't told me that you believe it is true. You can't get beyond the fact that there's ugly gossip going round and that I'm in love with him. If you thought this was your dying oath, that heaven depended upon the truth of your statement, can you say that in your soul you believe that Michael has taken this woman with him, that he is utterly treacherous and faithless? Does your unconquerable voice condemn him?"

Freddy thought for a moment. "It looks very black, Meg. The evidence is very convincing."

"Confound the evidence!" she said. "That is not an answer. I asked you, does your inner self, your superman, believe absolutely in his guilt?" Meg was staring at him with hard, questioning eyes; all trace of her love for him had been driven out.

"Well no, if you put it like that, perhaps not. But I can't have your name connected with these stories."

"My name?" she cried. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that our women have married straight, clean, honourable men."

"The Lamptons again!" she said. "Am I never to be free from tradition? Just because I'm a Lampton, I am to behave in a mean, disloyal manner to the man I swore to trust? Do you suppose I'm going to? If you do, you're much mistaken. In my own heart I've been Michael's wife for weeks and weeks, so you needn't imagine I'm going to divorce him."

"But I do, Meg." Freddy rose from the table. "Now, look here," he said, "try to speak dispassionately. How

can I, as your sole male guardian, countenance an engagement between you and Michael while there is only too much ground for belief that this story is true? I've not only heard it from the natives."

"You're wholly without reason. You just said you didn't believe it!" The words flashed from Meg's lips like the fire from a gun.

"I find it hard to believe. One always wants to hear two sides of a story. If Michael can swear that it is not true——"

"There is only one side to this story—that it is a lie."

"Then why has this report been spread about? There is always some fire where there is smoke, even in Egypt."

"I don't know, Freddy." Meg's voice broke; something suddenly choked her.

"The story goes that they met as if by accident in the open desert. Millicent had taken a splendid travelling equipment with her. She has made no secret of her love for Michael in the camp."

Meg was silent. A furious rage was gnawing at her bowels; it was going to her brain.

"Michael made a fine show of surprise," Freddy continued. "But it did not deceive the natives. She doesn't seem to be very popular with them."

Meg was thinking and thinking. Was this the explanation why over and over again she had had presentiments that Michael was in trouble, that he needed her? She had so often tried to reach him. Suddenly a light broke on her darkness, her whirlwind of anger abated.

"Freddy," she said, more gently. "If Millicent was in the camp, their meeting in the desert *was* unexpected by Michael. She trapped him, she planned it all. Don't you remember that night when you found me on the balcony? I told you I had heard Michael calling to me. I can hear his voice now." She paused. "He woke me as surely as Mohammed Ali wakes me every morning. He wouldn't have wanted my help if he had been happy with Millicent,

if he had aranged the meeting." Meg laughed, but there were tears in her voice. "That's the explanation, as clear as daylight. It's been sent to me, this light, to lighten my darkness."

"What is as clear as daylight, Meg? You put far too much faith in dreams and visions. I want to get you out of this. I wish you were more like your old practical self. What has this wonderful light made clear?"

"That Millicent tricked and trapped Michael, that she followed him."

"Do you mean that you think that she met Michael against his wish?" Freddy's soul wondered at the faith of women.

"I do. I don't think she ever mentioned her plans to him. I can see it all as clear as a pikestaff." A sudden sob broke Meg's voice. Her thankfulness at the unexpected revelation of the mystery caused it. "Of course, that's it. Millicent tempted Michael, after she had once met him. He thought he was proof against her woman's wiles, but while we're on earth we're only human, Freddy, and he was afraid of his own weakness. He called to me. We arranged to help each other—we were always to try our best to reach each other when we felt troubled. Love is not such a simple thing as it seems. I used to think that when once one was engaged to the man one loved, one would just be at anchor in a divine calm."

"You believe in dreams and all that sort of thing too much. Michael's led you off—he's to blame."

"There are some things one must believe in, Freddy. Our development is in other hands."

"What are they? Mere old wives' tales and charlatans' prophecies."

"Oh, Freddy!"

"Well, Michael's religion's got so mixed, he doesn't know what he is or what he believes in and doesn't believe in. He has a fine scorn for the old order of things. The beliefs of our forefathers have kept the Lampton men pretty

straight and made splendid wives and mothers of their women, and I think that's good enough for this everyday, practical world!"

"Has it been their belief that has done it, Freddy, or their family traditions? I think we Lamptons are as true ancestor-worshippers as any Shintoists in Japan. I was never taught anything about my higher self as a child, or made to see that religion was a vital part of our existence. It was the shades of our ancestors, nothing more or less—what would Uncle John have thought, or what would Aunt Anna think? It was never what would your own soul think—was it now? It was pure Shinto. Our god-shelf bore the family-portraits."

"A jolly good worship, too. You can't do anything very far wrong if you never disgrace the honour of your ancestors. I think it's as good a principle, and far more practical and restraining than Michael's mixture of Akhnaton's Aton worship and I don't know what else. I get lost when he expounds his idea of God."

"It annoys you that his God is too big for any church. The Lamptons have always been ardent upholders of the Established Church of England."

"Let him enlarge his church, build his God a bigger one."

"That's just what he has done, that's just what he says the Protestant church has failed to do. Their church has never expanded. People's minds have grown, while the Church of England—and, in fact, all churches—have stood still."

"Michael can't do things in moderation—he's just an enthusiast about his religion, as he has been about all his phases."

"The best of all things! What were your Luthers, your Cromwells, and St. Francis?" Meg paused. Her voice fell. "And Our Lord? Weren't they enthusiasts? Did they take things moderately? Does moderation ever achieve

anything? Napoleon said no country was ever conquered by half methods."

"Mike's enthusiasm is only theoretical. If he has done this thing, his new religion allows him too much latitude. He'd much better have stuck to our plain ancestor-worship."

"But he hasn't done it! You know he hasn't. Don't go over it again. That detestable woman met him and trapped him."

"And tempted him? The old, old story—the world's first romance—'the woman tempted me and I fell.'"

Meg's tears had dried very quickly. She was strong again. "I don't see how you can speak like that. You told me that Michael was straight as a die—you know you did."

"But I said he was weak—I told you that, too, didn't I?"

"If being human is weak, then I suppose he is. I never met a man who was a saint. And if believing that we are all more good than bad is weak, then I admit his lack of strength. It is his humility that makes it impossible for him to think evil of anyone. I have often proved it. Almost any man is a better man than himself in his own eyes."

"Bosh!" Freddy said. "I do wish he was more ordinary, less of a crank about these things! How can he think he isn't as good a man as that fair-tongued, lying Mohammed Ali, for instance, or any of these lying sensualists? It's the ugliest of all prides, the one that apes humility, Meg. Lots of religious enthusiasts have it."

"No, not with Michael. He thinks he is less good than they are because he is perfectly conscious of God," as he expresses it. He enjoys all the privileges of a close connection with God; he doesn't only pray to Him, as we do. He lives with Him; Mike is never alone. And yet with all that sense of God, he is full of faults and failings. These men and women, who to us appear so bad, are simply further back in their evolution. They can't be bad, if it is not their fault. They have not had the same privileges,

they are only gradually evolving. Spiritually they are like the dwellers in the slums as compared with the inmates of the beautifully-appointed hygienic house in the country. Michael is in the light; these poor souls are in darkness. It is all a part of the Great Law."

Freddy had finished his tea. It had afforded him little pleasure. He must come to some definite understanding with Meg. His thoughts had been all centred on the plan of sending her home, getting her away from the atmosphere which had so strong a hold over her imagination. Perhaps if she was back in England, she might be able to put Michael and his ideas out of her thoughts. He had no wish to be disloyal to his friend, or to give him no chance to defend himself; but he had to admit that he was very thankful that it was Michael himself who had insisted that there was to be no recognized engagement between them. Had he at the time had any motive for insisting on the fact? That was an idea; it had not occurred to him before.

He turned to Meg and said abruptly: "What about going home, Meg? It's getting too hot for this sort of thing—the Valley is stifling."

"What do you mean?"

"It's too hot—the year's advancing."

Meg tried to speak calmly.

"Don't treat me like a naughty child, Freddy. If it gets hotter than the Inferno I won't leave the place until I hear from Michael." She was not going to be a Lampton in one respect and not in another. A horse with the staggers was not in it with a mulish Lampton.

"If you hear from him, or find undeniable proofs that the story is true, will you go then?"

"Yes, when Michael tells me with his own lips, or I see it in his own handwriting, or I myself am convinced that Millicent was with him, I will meekly obey you. You can rely upon the Lampton pride. It won't fail me."

"Right you are, old girl! That's all I'll ask." Freddy

bent down and pressed her head to his breast. "I hope to God that will never be, old lady, you know that."

Freddy's little touch of tenderness was the last straw. It was too much for Meg. She turned round and hid her face against his shoulder. A very fountain of weeping welled up.

"You dear, blessed old thing! I've been a brute, a perfect brute, but I love him awfully! Oh, Freddy, you don't know how much I can love, and you hurt me dreadfully!" She had sobbed out the words. The fiery Lampton was now a sorrowing, heartsick girl, hungering for her lover's caresses. Freddy's gentleness had called up a thousand wants.

Freddy knew that affection was what she needed, but he was a bad hand at any show of brotherly emotion. The Lampton men were fine lovers; no woman had ever found them wanting in the art. But it was part of their tradition to suppress all outward signs of family affection. Instinct told him that some caresses and a petting were what his sister longed for. For weeks she had been robbed of a lover's devotion, a very fine lover, who had filled her days with romance and her heart with song.

"You weren't a bit a brute, Meg. You were just as usual, a bit more like a man than a girl. I'd have done and said just as you did if anyone had said things about the woman I loved—or, I hope I should."

Meg only hugged her brother. Words were beyond her. She knew by the way he was speaking that he was quite glad to help her, now that he had got over the disagreeable business of telling her and warning her, that his efforts would be turned towards the finding of Michael's whereabouts and getting to the bottom of the gossip. She looked up with cheerful eyes.

"Do you remember that day, Freddy, when Millicent Mervill lunched here?"

"Rather!"

"And you said she came for some object which she took care not to reveal?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, I never told you, because I thought you had good reason for thinking that I was too hard on her, that I was jealous of her, to the exclusion of all reason. . . ."

"You are pretty good at hating, Meg."

"Well, Mohammed Ali has since told me where he found her eye of Horus. Guess where it was."

Freddy laughed. "I'm sure I couldn't."

"She read my diary all the time she was here alone. He says she asked if she might rest and tidy up in my room. He found the eye of Horus just beside the table where she had been reading it. He thinks that it must have caught in the key of the drawer in the table. Probably she thought we were coming and moved quickly away—the ring was easily wrenched open."

"The little cad!" Freddy said slowly. "The venomous little toad!"

"In my diary, Freddy, I referred to Michael's strange journey, his journey to King Solomon's Mines, as we always called it."

Freddy freed himself from his sister's arms and lit a cigarette.

"What a mean little brute! Mohammed Ali was probably in her pay; he told her he had found the eye at the spot where she dismounted."

"He said he told that lie because Madam made a face at him. He confesses to that."

Freddy thought for a moment while he smoked, then he said slowly and deliberately: "If she got that information from your diary, she could easily get more. *Baksheesh* will make the dead give up their secrets. That is why Bismarck said to his generals, never tell your own shirt what you want kept a secret. Diaries are dangerous things, Meg."

"I wrote it in French," Meg said. "I thought only the

servants would stoop to reading it and they can't read French."

"Next time, try invisible ink. In Egypt, once a thing is written or told, it is public property."

"I scarcely write anything now," she said. "I feel as if some spy will see it, and the dry bones of a diary never interest me."

As Freddy was leaving the sitting-room—he was going to bed for a couple of hours before he began work again—Margaret said to him:

"Just tell me before you go, where you first heard the report about Michael, and from whom you heard it."

"One or two days ago," he said. "I heard a smouldering gossip about it going on amongst the workmen. They'd got wind of it somehow. No one ever knows how these things begin. Then I met young King from Professor L——'s camp, and he told me the whole story. He knew Millicent very well. He said she's not what you could call an immoral woman so much as a woman without morals. He confesses he never met anyone in the least like her before, and he rather prides himself on his knowledge of the world—he would have us believe that he has seen a devil of a lot. He wondered at a man of Michael's refined temperament taking her into the desert in the way he has done."

"He never took her," Meg said. "Isn't it hateful, Freddy, hearing people make these assertions about our Mike?"

"That's what I meant," Freddy said, "when I told you that I hated your name being mixed up with his."

"Oh, that's not what troubles me. No one knows me out here, or my affairs. I meant that it's such a wicked libel on Michael, who's not here to defend himself."

"But if she's there with him, what can you expect the world to say, to believe?"

"If she followed him and joined him, it wouldn't be very easy to shake her off, would it?"

Freddy smiled. "You're right there—the fair Millicent wouldn't go because she wasn't wanted!"

"I often ask myself why and how we tolerated her."

"Did we?" Freddy laughed.

"Well, yes, we did. Even I found myself liking her that day after lunch. I began to wonder if I had always been too hard on her, if I had had my judgment perverted by my jealousy."

"Surely you're not really jealous of Millicent?" Freddy paused. "That is, if you are confident that Michael is not with her at the present moment?"

"I am confident, Freddy. All the same, I have lots to be jealous of. Her beauty amazes me every time I look at her, and, after all, beauty is a rare and wonderful thing. Lots of women are good to look at and attractive, but Millicent is beautiful. You have often said how rare real beauty is and how carelessly we use the expression. Millicent deserves it."

"You needn't be jealous of mere beauty, Meg. Even when she's on her best behaviour, she never could impress a stranger as being anything but what she is, a soulless little minx."

"Yet you thoroughly enjoyed her company, Freddy."

"I know I did. She's amusing, her personality is stimulating. But I shouldn't like to have too much of it."

"Yet you'd have kissed her if you'd been alone with her—you said you'd try!"

Freddy did not deny the accusation.

"Men are queer things," Meg said; "but you must get off to bed, you look awfully tired."

She hated to have to send him away, for it was only on very rare occasions, and quite unexpectedly, that Freddy expressed his opinions. He belonged to the silent order of mankind; to strangers he never revealed himself; he rarely said anything in their presence which suggested that he had opinions at all, or that he was really an exceedingly thoughtful person. Meg knew that he had ideas and

thoughts—very sound, clear ideas, too. She knew that Freddy thought while other men talked. All the same, his opinions and thoughts, apart from his profession, were apt to be strangled and suffocated by tradition. Tradition was a mighty force in the Lampton family. It almost, as Meg said, amounted to ancestor-worship. Freddy's choice of a profession had been his one act of emancipation. He had, according to family tradition, been destined for either the navy or the army, and it had taken no little strength of character to cut the first link in the chain.

When Freddy had gone to lie down and the little hut was left to its midday silence—the tropical breathless silence of Upper Egypt, when the sun is so hot that even a lizard would not venture from its shelter—Meg sat down on a chair close to the table, and laid her head on her arms.

She was tired, tired, tired. She must forget things for a little time, before she even tried to review the situation, or think out what was best to be done. If only she could will herself into absolute unconsciousness for a little time, how sweet it would be! If she let herself sleep—even though sleep seemed very far from her—she might dream of Millicent, and that would be worse than wakefulness and remembrance. To trust herself to the lordship of dreams was to seek refuge in the unknown, and that was dangerous. It was total unconsciousness which she desired, the restful unconsciousness of a blank mind. She remained perfectly still for a little time, asking for rest, asking for the power not to think. She concentrated her thoughts on this one desire; she opened her being for the reception of peace.

Suddenly the voice which heals spoke. It suggested a respite for her troubles. "No mind can remain a blank," it said. "Try instead to think of your vision, fill your whole being with its beauty, repeat to yourself all that happened during that wonderful revelation."

Unconsciously and swiftly Meg's painful thoughts drifted away. The picture of Millicent amusing and tempting her lover, which had danced before her eyes, was

no longer there—or, at all events, it was not dominating her mind, and Freddy's words no longer rang in her ears. Her misery, made by her own thoughts, left her, as a headache leaves a sufferer when a sedative has been administered. The gentle voice, the divine attendant, achieved its work. Meg had asked for rest and for forgetfulness. Her prayer was being answered. It repeated to her the tender words of Akhnaton; it told her in Michael's own dear way the true explanation of her vision. With tightly-closed eyes and her head bowed, she saw again the whole scene. It was unnaturally vivid—the luminous figure, with the pitying, sorrowful eyes. As she gazed at it, to her spirit came the same quiet comfort as had come to her on that night when the vision had visited her. So clearly could she see the rays of Aton behind the high crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, that she lifted up her head. Perhaps He was there, in the sitting-room, standing just in front of her? Had the luminous body penetrated the darkness of her tightly-closed eyes?

Meg blinked her eyes to rid them of their confusion; her fingers had been tightly pressed against them. She looked fixedly into the space in front of her. Nothing was there; the room was just as it had been when she closed her eyes. The disordered table, the cigarette-ash on the two saucers, the crumbs from a Huntley and Palmer's cake on the tablecloth—these homely things struck her as incongruous. She had expected a vision of Akhnaton; she had hoped for it.

She put her head down on her arms again; her thoughts had been very sweet; with closed eyes they might come back again. How absurd it was to think of such material things as the silver paper round the imported cake, and to remember that Freddy had said he was sick of tinned apricot jam!

These domestic thoughts had taken but a second. She was going back to her vision and to the happiness it had given her.

And so it came to pass that just as Michael had found solace for heart and mind in the dancing of the daffodils

which he had visualized in the eastern desert, so Meg's bruised heart lost its sense of fear in her visualizing of the world's first reformer.

. . . . .

When Freddy returned to the sitting-room, refreshed and invigorated, he woke his sister by his noisy entrance. He was extremely angry with himself, and showed his sorrow very tenderly.

Meg looked at him with half-awakened senses. Where was she? What was she doing? What hour of the day was it?

"Never mind, Freddy, I've slept long enough." She smiled, and looked as though the thoughts from which she drew her happiness were far away.

Freddy put his two hands on her shoulders and looked into her eyes. "Were your dreams very nice, old girl? You look as if you'd been playing on the Elysian plain, or had been re-born!"

Meg pulled her brother's face down to the level of her own and whispered, "Heavenly, Freddy, heavenly!"

## CHAPTER X

"Does my master feel refreshed?"

It was Abdul who spoke, as he wakened Michael after his midday siesta on the day which had brought them within sight of the Promised Land.

It had been a morning of intense heat; the desert held not one breath of air. The spell of Egypt, which is its light, had vanished; the vast emptiness was as colourless as Scotland in an east wind. Piled up on his camel, Michael had ridden under a raised shelter, such as is used by caravan travellers on long journeys. It was made of bamboos, bent into half-hoops and covered with a light canvas. Abdul had been afraid of exposing his master, in his uncertain

state of health, to the full force of the desert sun. Michael had been very grateful, for during the last two days it had made him feel sick and his head had ached perpetually.

"A touch of the sun," was Abdul's expressive description of his condition. He knew the symptoms only too well, and fortunately he also knew how to treat them.

In answer to Abdul's question, Michael yawned and stretched out his arms. "Yes, greatly refreshed, Abdul. How long have I slept? What time is it? I feel very much better."

"The Effendi's words give happiness to his servant," Abdul said. "With care my master will enjoy good health in a day or two."

"I'm all right now, Abdul. That last compress has done me a world of good. My headache has lifted." It was characteristic of Michael's temperament that when he was down, he was very, very down, and when he was up, he bounded and became scornful of all care and precautions.

"Everything is in readiness when my master is ready," Abdul said. "There are still three hours before sunset."

Michael rose from the impromptu couch which Abdul had made for him under the shadow of a mighty rock. The desert was no longer a shoreless sea of golden sand; they were reaching the reef of hills which was their objective.

When Michael found himself on his feet and ready to mount his camel—that undignified proceeding, which always made him realize his own helplessness and evoked from the camel ugly roars of justifiable resentment—he found himself scarcely as fit as he had thought; he was giddy and still distressingly tired. It was very annoying, not feeling up to his best form, now that they were drawing so close to the exciting spot. He had imagined that he would feel like a gold-miner hurrying to peg out his claim, instead of which he was conscious of but one feeling, physical and nervous exhaustion.

He braced himself up. The air was cooler; a little breeze

was lifting the sand and carrying its invisible atoms across the surface of the desert. How many times on his journey he had seen this noiseless drifting of the sand! Now, as he watched it from his high seat, it made him think of the saint's grave. Even in this short time much sand would have collected on the mound which covered his bones.

This ceaseless drifting of the sand was an object-lesson which illustrated very practically the complete obliteration of Egypt's ancient cities and lost civilizations. Michael knew that on such a day as this he had only to lay some small object down in the desert, and very soon an accumulation of sand would gather round it. After a little time the object would be completely lost to sight, and in its place there would be a little mound, which would grow and grow as the years rolled on, until it became a feature in the landscape. In such a way were the neglected temples of the gods saved from the ravages of fanatics.

To Michael this provision of Nature, this preserving of the world's earliest treasures and story, was very beautiful. It meant a great deal more than the mere accumulation of wind-blown sands; it meant that the Creating Hand is never still, that the making of the world is eternal. In Michael's opinion there was no doubt but that Egypt's priceless treasures had been designedly hidden, that the Author of Nature had preserved them until such a time as mankind was capable of appreciating them and guarding them. The drifting sands—ever at the caprice of the four winds to those who have eyes to see and see not—have saved Egypt's history, which is written in stone.

Reflecting, as was his wont, on these side-issues of the world's evolution, he journeyed on. The breeze was stiffening, a cool, invigorating breeze, which had cleared the sky and brought some white clouds into it. In the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings the heavens rarely held a cloud; in the eastern desert his travels had carried him northwards, where the dews are heavier and the sudden changes in the temperature less noticeable.

With the cooler atmosphere his spirits rose, his vitality quickened. Wonderful pictures danced before his eyes, pictures which he had seen over and over again, his first visualizing of the treasure. The vision had never been far from his mind. He could see himself inspecting the bars of gold which Akhnaton had hidden in the hills, and fingering the ancient jewels while he thought once more of the story he had been told by a member of an excavating camp in Egypt. The story reassured him: Some native workmen, belonging to the camp, had come across a number of terra-cotta crocks hidden under a flight of steps. They were full to the brim of bars of pure gold. The gold had obviously been thrust into the jars very hurriedly. The theory they suggested to experts was that the citizens, suddenly becoming alarmed by the approach of a besieging army, had thrust the wealth of the public treasury into the jars and hidden them in the hollow behind the steps of a staircase in some public building. If the Romans ever besieged the city, they had overlooked the jars and so the gold had remained in its simple hiding-place until the enthusiasm of modern Egyptologists discovered it. In the jars there was sufficient gold to pay for a year's excavation on the historical site.

Michael knew that such things were possible in Egypt, where tales as wonderful as any in *A Thousand and One Nights* are still being enacted. Egypt's buried treasures are infinite. In that land of amazing discoveries there has been nothing more amazing than the means of their discovery.

High up in the blue, on his swaying seat on the camel's back, he felt like a man in a cinematograph-theatre, gazing upon film after film as it came into view and dissolved away. The desert was the stage, his thoughts were the films. At one moment the picture presented was his old friend in el-Azhar, rejoicing in the knowledge that Michael's journey was accomplished, the treasure realized. He could see the African's eyes glowing like living fire; he could hear his

sonorous chanting. His next vision was of Margaret and her triumphant happiness; the next his own troubles and embarrassments, the troubles of too great wealth. What was he to do with the treasure now that he had discovered it? There were new laws and stringent regulations and restrictions which must be adhered to; the Government had become more grasping.

But these troubles he put aside. "Sufficient for the day was the finding thereof," the proving to scoffers that visionaries had legs to stand upon as well as heads. He could hear Freddy's boyish laugh, a laugh of sheer incredulity and amazement, and while Freddy laughed he could see and feel Margaret's eyes shining with victory. It made him very nervous and excited to think that soon he would be able to actually touch and examine the treasure and sacred writings of the world's first divinely-inspired prophet. The doubts of his material mind would be forever silenced when his fingers had held the jewels and his eyes had seen the gold.

Again he felt convinced that the spirit of Akhnaton had selected him to do this work. Freddy had been chosen to bestow upon mankind the contents of the royal tomb, which held such a mass of confounding matter. We are all the chosen workers in the Perfect Law, units in the Divine State.

As he rode on and on, he wondered what Abdul was thinking about, what his feelings were. Was he anticipating disappointment or success? What had his eyes seen?

They were approaching the spot indicated by the saint. It would, of course, take them some time to discover the chamber which held the hidden treasure, but it was sufficiently thrilling to be drawing nearer and nearer to the hills. The canvas had been removed from his sun-shelter; only the framework remained. It looked like the skeleton-ribs of an animal against the blue of the sky.

Suddenly Abdul came riding forward. He had some-

thing to say; he never disturbed Michael's meditations unnecessarily.

"Does the Effendi see anything in the distance?"

"No, Abdul, nothing. What do you see?"

Abdul's calm voice had betrayed a little emotion.

"Look once more, Effendi—over there, to the left, close to the hills."

Michael looked, and while he looked he was conscious of an ominous atmosphere in the silence.

"Can the Effendi see nothing?"

"No, Abdul, absolutely nothing. Yet I thought my eyes had improved, my seeing-powers developed. I was vain enough to think they were pretty good."

"For Western eyes they do see far, Effendi. You must allow some few privileges for those who are deprived of the benefits of civilization."

They rode on in silence.

"You can see something now, Effendi?" Abdul's voice trembled as it broke the stillness. "It is very clear now, O my master."

"Is it a mirage, or what, Abdul? What am I to see?"

"No mirage, Effendi—I wish it were one."

"Then out with it!" Michael said impatiently. He had not the vaguest idea what Abdul was hinting at; his mind had no room for side issues. "What desert monster lies in waiting for us? Don't make such a mystery out of nothing!"

"It is the Khedivial flag, O Effendi. I see it fluttering in the breeze."

"The Khedivial flag?" The words conveyed no meaning to Michael; the reason for its being there did not penetrate his brain. "What is there to trouble us about the Khedivial flag, Abdul?"

"*Aiwah*, Effendi, do not feel anger in your heart for your servant when he tells you what it means."

"We ate the salt of our covenant together, Abdul, on the night when you brought the saint in your arms to my camp.

I can never forget that you are more than my servant. You are my friend and companion."

"Our faith is a gift of God, Effendi, and all the good works we perform are the effects of a principle implanted and kept alive within us by the Spirit of God."

"Granting that is so, Abdul, which I do, nevertheless, the covenant of our friendship is sacred. Tell me, why does the flag trouble you?"

"Can my master see it now? Can he not distinguish any other objects?"

Michael looked again. They had travelled quickly. As he looked his heart stopped beating; his brain became confused; he felt like a drunken man. Clearly his eye had seen!

"My God!" he said inaudibly. "It can't be that, it can't be that!"

To his naked eye the crescent and the star on the waving flag were still invisible, but he could see its vivid red, and he could see other objects—white patches, like a collection of saints' tombs.

"Abdul," he said—his voice was miserably broken and spent—"what are those white things?"

"Tents, Effendi."

"Government tents?"

"*Aiwah*, Effendi."

"What are they doing near the hills?"

"Must Abdul speak the words which will cause his master pain? Will the Effendi not wait until we draw nearer? It is not wise to anticipate evil."

A horrible suspicion devastated Michael's brain. He could brook no uncertainty. Abdul's lengthy manner of getting to the point irritated him as it had never done before.

"Out with it, Abdul! Having said so much, you must say more." Michael was compelling his servant to give utterance to the suspicion which had become almost a certainty in his mind.

"*Aiwah*, Effendi. The treasure has alraedy been discovered."

"Good God! Do you think it is that, Abdul?"

"*Aiwah*, Effendi." Abdul's voice was contrite.

Michael felt as if all movement in the world had suddenly been arrested. Then his mind began scrambling amid the ruins of his dreams for some lucid thought, for some reason which would explain why he was seated high up on a camel's back in the eastern desert.

He had never dreamed of such an ending to his dreams. In his most despondent moods he had contemplated no greater misfortune than the stealing of the jewels and the gold, the looting of its portable treasures by native *antika* hunters. His super-man had never seriously contemplated even that misfortune; his faith was unshaken, his optimism complete.

The shock he had received affected his physical as well as his mental condition. An overwhelming desire came to him to get off his high seat and throw himself down on the sand and go to sleep for ever and ever. That hateful flag, those smiling tents! whose whiteness had brought a vision of Millicent's tent floating before his eyes.

"There are three tents, Effendi. Shall we journey towards them?" Abdul's voice sounded far away. What was he talking about? Michael tried to concentrate his thoughts.

"Oh yes, of course!" His voice was listless. "We must go on. You may be wrong." He struggled for mind-control.

He urged his camel to a quicker pace. They rode on in silence. Abdul was now convinced that the harlot—or, in other words, Mohammed Ali's "golden lady"—had wreaked her vengeance on his master. He had taken into his camp the fever-stricken saint; she had slipped away in the night and discovered the treasure. With a comprehensiveness which would have astounded the impurest of Western ears, he cursed Millicent and her vile offspring into the third and fourth generations.

## CHAPTER XI

As Michael got off his kneeling camel, a young Englishman left a tent, the outer one of the three which formed the excavation-camp, the white tents which Michael had seen from his high seat, and came quickly forward. It was obvious that strangers might come thus far and no further. In a voice of official authority, yet by no means ungraciously, he said to Michael:

"Can I do anything for you? What do you want? I'm afraid you can't come any nearer."

Michael looked blankly into the thin, intelligent face, a sunburnt face, which any woman would have described as attractively ugly. For a moment or two neither man spoke. There was an unpleasant silence. It was significant of the atmosphere of the meeting. It expressed to the excavator strain, rather than shyness, on the traveller's part. He had told Michael that he might come no further; he had asked him if he wanted anything.

At both remarks Michael almost laughed hysterically. He was not allowed to come any closer to his own treasure, to the gift of Akhnaton, to the legacy of the Pharaoh, which had been divinely revealed to him! This interloper had asked him if he wanted anything!

Quicker than light these thoughts flashed through his bewildered brain, while between himself and this representative of the Government the figure of the world's first divinely-inspired man, with the rays of Aton shining brilliantly from behind his head, became clearer and clearer. It obliterated the figure of the excavator.

"What are these tents doing here?" He managed to ask the question by sheer force of will power; he felt relieved that the words had come. "And that flag?"—he pointed to the Khedivial banner.

His companion hesitated for a moment. Who was this dazed questioner, who had suddenly appeared out of the sands of the desert? He looked almost as worn and physically exhausted as a desert fanatic.

"This is an excavation-camp which has just been sanctioned by the Minister of Public Works. We are engaged in making temporary researches. The time-limit is one month."

Without being in the least discourteous, his words conveyed the impression that in so short a time there was more to be done than talk to curious travellers.

"How long has the camp been here?" Michael asked. "I hope you won't think my questions impertinent. I have a very particular reason for wishing to know."

The blue eyes in the thin face became more alert. They searched Michael's face with the same scrutiny as they searched the debris of the ruins.

"About four days," he said coldly.

"Has the Government claimed the site?" Michael's voice trembled as he asked the question; it was so hard to keep cool.

"The Government is entitled to expropriate any land containing antiquities on paying a valuation and ten per cent. over, but this, of course, was not private property. It belongs to the Government."

"Yes, of course. I know something about these new rules—I have been working with Lampton in the Valley."

"Oh!" The stranger's voice at once became cordial and intimate. "I didn't know that I was speaking to a fellow-digger. How's Lampton?"

"I wasn't actually digging—I was doing some painting for him, and inking the pottery drawings. His latest discovery has developed amazing theories."

"So I've heard. But you look a bit done up. Come inside and have a drink." Before entering the tent, the stranger looked round. "Who's your man? Is he all right?"

"He's one of Lampton's men—absolutely trustworthy. He's been more than a servant to me for some weeks now." Michael paused, and then said abruptly, "Who told the Government of this site? What do you expect to find?"

"Will you first tell me where you got your information? Did you know we were here?"

"The *Omdeh* in the subterranean village spoke of it. He told me that the natives had discovered a hidden treasure, a sort of King Solomon's Mine, and that they were wading knee-deep in jewels and falling over cracks stuffed with Nubian gold—a desert fairytale, I suppose?"

"Absolutely! If there ever was any gold, it was not here when we arrived, and as for the jewels. . . !" He laughed. "Hallo! Are you feeling queer?"

Michael had managed to get inside the tent, but it was the limit of what his legs and head were fit for. He collapsed on to a lounge, made of wooden boxes covered with some rugs.

The stranger unfastened the padlock of a similar box to one of those upon which he was sitting with a key which hung from a chain at his side. He raised the lid; it had been converted into a wine-cellar.

"Hold hard," he said, in a kindly voice. "I'll give you a drink."

Michael was not fainting; he was merely in a state of physical collapse. He gladly accepted the proffered hospitality.

When he had swallowed the whiskey, he said: "I'm sorry, but I've been feeling a bit queer lately. For some days past I've had a touch of the sun." He could not tell this stranger of his bitter disappointment.

"Have you ridden far to-day?"

"Yes. I've been in the desert for some time now. We started this morning at dawn." He put the glass down on the rough trestle-table. "Thanks most awfully. I feel a lot better. You said there was no truth in the report about the gold and jewels—what are you expecting?"

"We have no trace of gold so far, but you must remember that it was a native who brought the information. Any discoverer is bound to inform the Government, and and portable object accidently found must be given up within six days."

"But the finder receives half its value?"

"Yes, but if there was this treasure-trove of gold and jewels, it's doubtful if natives would hand that over. It would have been a different thing if it had been monumental objects, or even antiques, as they always run the risk of being caught trafficking in them. They would be inclined to think that half their value is better than none, with the added risk of the heavy penalty. The new rules are very stringent."

"But the jewels? Is there no trace of any precious stones? Don't you think there's a little fire for all that smoke?"

"We heard all these wonderful reports, but we have found no trace of any treasure. What the native reported was that he, along with some other *fellahin*, had accidentally come across some traces of ancient masonry, not far from Akhnaton's tomb. After digging for a few days, they discovered an underground passage, which led into a chamber; in it we came upon some papyri."

"You have found papyri?" Michael said. His tired eyes suddenly glowed; his excitement was obvious.

"Yes, we have found papyri. They promise to be of exceptional interest."

"Of what dynasty?" Michael could scarcely speak, or hide his anxiety while he waited for an answer to his question. To be able to assume an outward appearance of calmness, he was putting a great strain on his self-control. He held himself so well in hand that the stranger little guessed how much his answer meant to the exhausted traveller.

"Amenhotep IV."

A cry rang through the room. "Akhnaton! did you say?

Then it is true!" Margaret, the old man in el-Azhar, and the saint, they had all seen and spoken the truth. For a moment the stranger was forgotten. It was Margaret who was looking at him with glad triumphant eyes. Happy Meg!

"Yes, the heretic Pharaoh," the stranger said, as he gazed fixedly at Michael. Was this man more than a little touched with the sun? He felt nervous of how to proceed. Why was he so excited and pleased? "These hills, you know, were the boundary of his capital. You appear interested in him? He certainly was a wonderful character."

The more conventional and colder tones of his voice made Michael guarded. Kind as he was, he was just the type of man who would laugh to scorn anything he might have told him. Freddy's friendly laughter never troubled Michael; the scorn of a stranger was a different thing.

"Have you deciphered any of the papyri?"

"No, we haven't had the time. We've only gone into them sufficiently to discover their date. This is, of course, a temporary search. We can only do in a month what is absolutely necessary. If regular excavations are to be made, which I presume there will be, we shall, of course, have to wait for a bit, while the final regulations are gone through, and until the necessary money is forthcoming. These last new rules and restrictions are putting a stop to any private enterprise. There is nothing left to pay the cost of the dig."

"On the whole, I suppose, they do good?"

"They don't do what they were meant to do—and that is, stop the stealing and selling of valuable antiques which the Government, rightly enough, does not wish to leave the country, and desires to have the disposal of."

"I had hoped the new restrictions would stop that."

"You see, the penalties only apply to the natives and the Turks, with the result that the native dealer simply puts an Italian or a Greek name over his door. To the foreigner,

the native is only the agent, officially—the dealer is the Greek or Italian whose name is over the door."

"They'd be sure to get out of the difficulty somehow," Michael said. "About antiques they have no conscience, and they are awfully clever."

"An inspector may now raid their premises at any time of the day or night, and nothing is allowed to be sold outside authorized and licensed shops. Every dealer has to keep a day-book, with an entry of each object in his shop over five pounds in value, the purchaser's name must be filled in, and every page of the register sealed by the Inspector of Antiquities."

Michael laughed. "Trust the native mind to find a way to circumvent all these fine restrictions!"

His thoughts had flown to Millicent. If she had, as Abdul believed, discovered the jewels and the gold, where were they now? It was very odd that, even with this damning evidence that she had anticipated his find before his eyes—for she and she alone could have known of it—his finer senses refused to believe that she had cheated and tricked him. He had no argument to put forward to justify his belief; it was one of those beliefs which are rooted in something finer and truer than circumstantial evidence. His only argument in her favour was that he had never found her mercenary, but, as Abdul had answered him, a woman will sell her soul for jewels.

He felt woefully sick and dejected, far too physically exhausted to run the risk of exposing himself to the scorn and laughter of the excavator, who was speaking to him in a manner which unconsciously betrayed to the hypersensitive Michael that he considered the traveller rather too odd to waste much valuable time over. Michael wondered, in a slow, broken sort of way, what the cold eyes would look like if he suddenly produced the uncut crimson amethyst from the purse in his waistbelt. He would probably have said that it was a clever part of the native fable; he would

probably say that the ancient stone might have come from any royal tomb in Egypt, that it proved nothing.

As a lengthy silence had elapsed, Michael felt that it was incumbent on him to be getting on his way. He must pretend to the excavator that he was now well enough to resume his journey. As he rose, rather inertly, from his low seat, he said:

"You say the native who brought the information of the find said nothing at all about the jewels and the gold?"

"Not a word! We have heard all that since. As you know, news travels in the desert in the most amazing fashion, once the natives get ear of it."

"Won't you try and follow up the track of the story—find out how it originated? Are you content to take it for granted that it is all moonshine?"

"We are doing something about it—but it's very difficult." The stranger spoke guardedly. "The only way is to set a thief to catch a thief. Gold can be melted, ancient stones can be cut, a hundred dealers will be eager to run any risk to get them."

A flood of anger coloured Michael's face; it brought out beads of perspiration on his forehead. He could scarcely contain himself; his rage tore at his bowels. His long journey, all that he had gone through—was this the end of it? Could anything be more flat, more stale, more unprofitable? What a sudden tumble from the blue to brown earth! Above all, how maddening to have to hold his tongue, because no man would believe the story he could tell them, to have meekly to submit to the conventional etiquette of the moment! He felt anything but conventional. His anger had driven all finer feelings from his mind. If he could only find the native who had desecrated the treasure-trove, he would hang and quarter him without mercy!

"I'm afraid I must be getting back to my work," the excavator said. "But you needn't hurry. Rest here for as long as you like, only don't think me inhospitable if I leave you. Time's too precious to waste one moment."

"Thanks very much," Michael said. "But I'm quite fit. You've been awfully kind. It's time I was on my way."

"Where are you going to?"

"Back to my camp."

"Back to your camp? where did you leave it?"

Michael told him.

"Then did you come on here on purpose to visit this dig? Had you heard of it before you saw the *Omdeh* in the underground village?"

"I'd rather not answer your question at present, if you don't mind. All that I know about it, Lampton also knows. . . . Some day, I hope, if we meet again, I will tell you the whole thing. It's an odd story, even for Egypt."

The man looked annoyed. "You can't tell me anything more? Have you any information that could help us? We have our suspicions that things aren't straight. If the natives weren't wading knee-deep in jewels, there was probably, as you say, some truth in the report that there were valuable antiques."

"I've nothing reliable to go upon," Michael said. Nothing that a man in his normal senses would pay any attention to—that was Lampton's verdict."

Again the stranger looked at Michael with calm, searching eyes.

"Yet you believe in what you heard? You believed enough to bring you across the desert to find it?"

"If you ask Lampton, he'll tell you that I'm not quite in my normal senses—that I frequently walk on my head."

"Lampton's a sound man."

"Well, that's his opinion."

"You're a rum chap," the stranger said, as he noticed that a glint of humour had for the moment driven the expression of exhaustion from Michael's eyes. "Anyhow, I hope you'll not feel too knocked up when you arrive in camp, and that we'll meet again."

"I feel as if I could sleep for a year."

"Have another whiskey before you go?"

"No thanks. I think one has been more than enough—it's made me confoundedly tired."

They were standing at the open front of the tent.

"Good-bye," Michael said. "And thanks most awfully for your hospitality. I suppose you won't settle on the work here until next season?"

"No, it will be hot enough at the end of three weeks, though it's cooler here than with Lampton in the Valley. If the money is forthcoming, we shall take up work again next October."

They parted abruptly, as Englishmen do. Two *fellahin*, mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, would have gone through a set formula of graceful words before they separated. They are ever mindful of the teachings of the Koran, which says:

"If you are greeted with a greeting, then greet ye with a better greeting. God taketh account of all things."

Michael had turned his back on the stranger and the waving flag. Mechanically he put his hand to his belt-pouch. Yes, the crimson amethyst was still there. He felt for it as though he were in a dream. The bright light made him giddy. The stone was his link with and his tangible assurance that the life which he had led for the past weeks was a reality; it was his sacred token that the vision of Akhnaton was no mere phantom of an over-imaginative brain. Yet, even as he felt its hard substance between his thumb and forefinger, he wondered if it was really there. He knew that imagination can create strange things; phantom tumours have been produced by imagination, tumours which are visible to a physician's eye while the patient is conscious and his mind obsessed with the conviction that it is there; he knew that such swellings disappear when the patient is asleep. He felt dazed, and as if he himself were unreal; his feet refused to tread firmly on the earth; they never managed to reach it. When he looked for Abdul and the camels, they were floating in the heavens above the

horizon, miles and miles away; there was a belt of sky between them and the desert sand. If his legs had been paralyzed, they could not have felt heavier or more useless.

He struggled on, but very soon the desert and the sky became one; the world in front of him rose suddenly up and stood on end. It was quite impossible to reach Abdul—he was receding as the horizon recedes when a clear atmosphere foreshortens the distance. In his brain there was a confused jumble; it was full of things which had no meaning or cohesion. Millicent was the centre of the absurd medley. Millicent, naked and unashamed, her slender figure as thickly covered with uncut jewels of huge dimensions as the statues of Diana of Ephesus are covered with breasts. The jewelled vision of Millicent dominated every other picture in his brain. It was clearer than the village of flies, or the African's cell in far-off el-Azhar, or the procession of white figures returning from the burial of the desert saint. It moved along in the clear air in front of him. He had no reasoning powers left, or he would have asked himself why his subconscious brain had fashioned this vision of Millicent wearing the sacred jewels when he still believed in her innocence. The clear voice, man's divine messenger, had kept him assured of the truth of his conviction.

Everything was dreadfully confused. He wished that the horizon would not come right forward and almost throw him off his balance. He seemed to be constantly hitting up against it. And Abdul, why was he floating further and further away? The harder he tried to get to him, the further he went. And yet he could actually hear him reciting his prayers. He was telling his rosary. Why did he tantalize him by coming so near and then floating off again? Sometimes he came so near that he could see his fine fingers automatically pulling the beads along the string; a tassel of red silk hung from the end of it. There were ninety-nine small red beads and one large one. He had reached the fifty-ninth. Michael could tell that, because the words "O Giver of Life" came to him sonorously

across the desert stillness. The next one would be "O Giver of Death," but Abdul had floated away again. Now he came back; he had said "O Living One," "O Enduring," "O Source of Discovery."

That was the sixty-third bead. Why had Abdul stopped at that one? Why did he keep on repeating the words "O Source of Discovery," "O Source of Discovery"? He ought to pass on to the next—"O Worthy of All Honour" and after that the sixty-fifth, "O Thou Only One." No one ever stopped at the sixty-third bead; all the attributes of Allah had to be recited. But Abdul was still saying it over and over again. "O Source of Discovery," "O Source of Discovery." The words danced before Michael's eyes in letters of gold, like the advertisement of Bovril which he had watched so often from the Thames Embankment, as it appeared and disappeared in the sky across the river.

And then again the letters were obliterated by the nude figure of Millicent, with her hanging breasts of jewels. How delicate her limbs were, how white her skin! The sun would blister it; if he could only reach her, he would give her his coat. Like himself, she was walking in the clear air and not on the firm earth. She was walking as St. Peter had walked on the waves of the sea.

Then something happened. He stumbled and would have fallen, but for a great strength which gathered him up and sheltered him under the shadow of Everlasting Arms.

. . . . . .

Abdul, with Eastern philosophy, had sat himself down to wait while his master interviewed the director of the "dig." His soul was vexed and his mind was ill at ease. His master's health was the principal cause of his anxiety. His anger at the harlot, and his disappointment, mingled with this anxiety, made him unusually despondent.

He seated himself on a knoll where his master could easily see him when he left the excavator's tent. It was not yet time for the performance of his *maghrib*, or sunset prayer, which had to be said a few minutes after the sun had set.

He began to recite his rosary, telling an attribute of God to each bead. When he had got about half-way through the long list of names which form the Mohammedan rosary and by which the Moslem addresses his Creator, he saw Michael leave the tent and walk out into the sunlight.

For a moment or two he seemed to be walking quite steadily and to be coming towards him. Then suddenly he began to stagger and lurch like a drunken man.

Abdul rose from his seat and hurried towards him. What had seemed such a long way to Michael had only been a few yards. His visions and fears and the constant repetition of the sixty-third attribute of Allah had been concentrated into the last few seconds before he stumbled and fell, just as our dreams are enacted in the last moments before we wake. Abdul had scarcely said the words "O Source of Discovery" for the first time when he rose from his seat and hurried to his master, who had stumbled and fallen. In his Moslem arms was God's Everlasting Mercy.

## CHAPTER XII

THE heat in the Valley had become intense. The work in the excavation-camp was at a standstill; nothing more could be done on the actual site until the late autumn.

Margaret and Freddy were soon to say good-bye to the little hut which had been their home for many months.

No direct news had come to them of Michael. Freddy had heard many accounts and varying reports from unreliable sources of his travels in the eastern desert. He was almost convinced that Michael's silence was due to the fact that there was some foundation for the scandal, which was persistent, that Millicent was one of his party. The report had drifted to him from so many sources that he could scarcely doubt it. It had sprung up and flourished like seed blown over light soil. He was loath to believe that his

friend, even if it had not been by his own willing or desire, should have permitted the woman to stay with him when he was Margaret's acknowledged lover. He despised him for being such a weak fool. If Freddy could have left his work, he would have started off without delay to look for Michael, or at least he would have contrived to discover the reason for his silence and what degree of truth there was in the story of Millicent's being with him. Situated as he was, it was impossible for him to desert his post. He had purposely avoided opening up the subject again with Margaret; it was better to wait until a sufficient length of time had elapsed and then, if no word came from Michael, he would speak to her again and hold her to her promise to return home and try to drive the whole affair from her mind.

Even as he said the words to himself, he knew that they were absurd, that such a thing was hopeless. Meg was not the sort of woman to trust and love a man and then forget him. There could be no driving him from her mind. Freddy knew that she had enough strength of character to do whatever she thought was right. If circumstances compelled her to give Michael up, she would do it, but in so doing her youth would be killed, her heart broken. Her life would have to be re-made. A love like Margaret's was a serious thing; Freddy realized that. He must go to work carefully and judiciously.

It hurt him more than Meg ever knew, to watch her suffering and ever-growing anxiety. She made no complaint and very seldom alluded to her lover's silence or to his absence. When she spoke of him, it was generally to recall some happy incident which had happened in their secluded life, little things culled from the store-closet of her precious memories.

It was to the stars and to the wide heavens that her heart relieved itself. They heard the full story of her trust and loyalty and the confessions of her jealous woman's heart; they bore her cry to the understanding ear.

It was impossible for Margaret to believe any wrong of her lover. If she had short waves of doubt and agonizing moments of uncertainty and indecision, they were always dispelled by the sudden inflow of beautiful thoughts, which came like divine visions to her, as direct assurances of Mike's loyalty and steadfastness.

It was Freddy who caused her the cruellest suffering. It was so dreadful to think that he, of all people, doubted, distrusted Mike! If she had not cared for him so greatly it would not have mattered, but apart from Michael he was the being she loved and respected most on earth. His eyes haunted her; the doubt in them never left her mind; it argued against her finer judgment. That her dear chum should be working against her higher voice, her super-self, troubled her. It seemed to set up a barrier between them, which was the cruellest part of the whole affair. If he would only let her alone, she would go to some cooler spot and there wait and wait until Michael came to her, for she knew that he would come back to her, bringing her the same beautiful love as he had carried away. She knew perfectly well that in spite of her foolish fits of depression and distrust, he was wholly and absolutely hers while he was alive on this earth.

Freddy bore the expression of one who was waiting to deliver judgment. Meg could see his annoyance kindling day by day. She could feel him looking at her when he thought that she was not noticing. The deeper circles under her eyes told Freddy their tale; the sagging of her clothes, as they hung from her boyish limbs, the pitiful flattening of her young breasts. This new and delicate-looking Margaret was very beautiful. Our Lady of Sorrows had laid her hand upon her with a softening grace; the new Meg had acquired what boyish Meg had never possessed. Under her eyes, on her clear skin there were dark shadows, which looked as if they had been made by the impress of carboned thumbs which had pressed tired eyes to sleep. Meg's steadfast, honest eyes now expressed things

of a deeper meaning than mere comradeship and brains; their beauty was quickened by the soul of suffering. Even in Freddy's eyes she was much more attractive than she had been six months ago. She was now a great deal more than merely pretty. As he watched her bearing her anxiety and what appeared to him her humiliation with so much calm dignity and braveness, he said to himself over and over again, "She's a thousand times too good for a man who could behave like a weak fool, if indeed Mike isn't worse?"

He was looking at her now, as she lay in a deck-chair, her eyes closed and her hands folded across her book. They had both been reading, after a hard day's work. Meg had not turned many pages of her book; her thoughts had wandered. As she felt her brother's eyes upon hers, she raised her eyelids and looked at him steadily as she said:

"Freddy, I'm going to see Hadassah Ireton."

Freddy sat bolt upright. He, too, had been lying stretched out on a lounge-chair.

"Going to see Mrs. Ireton? But you don't know her?"

He did not ask Meg why she was going; he knew.

"That doesn't matter—I know all about her. My heart and mind know her, and, after all, that's the important thing—it's the only thing that matters."

"But, Meg——"

"Chum, no 'buts'—'buts' belong to small things. This is my life. We must do something. You can't leave your work; I am no longer needed."

"But what can Hadassah Ireton do?"

"I don't know—she'll know. I feel she'll know. That's why I'm going." She paused. "I've been told to go."

"Oh, nonsense! How's this going to clear things up?" Freddy paused.

"I don't know. If I did, I shouldn't go to the Iretons'. It's because I don't know, and nothing's being done, that I mean to go to her and consult her."

"But why on earth trouble a stranger? I dislike the idea."

"There are some human beings who are never strangers. Suffering unites people. Hadassah Ireton has suffered."

Freddy knocked the ash from his cigarette. A lump had risen up in his throat.

"What are you going to ask her to do?" Meg did not know the pain her words had given him; he spoke huskily.

"She's going to advise me what to do." Meg raised herself from her reclining position. "She will help me, if Michael's ill, Freddy."

"I don't suppose he is—I think we'd have heard."

"I think that's why we haven't heard," Margaret said quickly.

Freddy remained silent. He thought otherwise. He had a man's knowledge of men. If Millicent Mervill was with him, he did not for one moment believe that even Mike would be proof against such temptation.

"If he is ill," Meg said, "the Iretons will find out. They are in such close touch with native life. Anyhow, they understood Mike and I want to see them."

Meg's last words were a little cry. Freddy could only feel pity for her, although her words stung him. She must actually go from him to strangers for the sympathy she needed.

"Well, I won't stop you, but I think it's a pity. Whatever made you think of such a thing?"

"The thing that you call inspiration, chum—I know another name for it now."

Freddy looked amazed; Meg had absorbed so many of Mike's strange ideas. "I don't know Ireton," he said. His voice had grown colder.

"He married a Syrian—you wouldn't. The Lamptons don't do that sort of thing."

Freddy kept his temper, and the moment after Meg had said the words she felt ashamed, disgraced.

"I'm sorry, chum." She spoke gently. "It's my tongue that says these hateful things, not my heart. Forgive me, like a dear."

"All right, old girl." Freddy had never told his sister that he had refused the hospitality and cut himself off from the friendship of more than two English families, residents in Cairo, because they had taken a prominent part in the outcasting of Michael Ireton from English society when he had married Hadassar Lekejian. He knew that Margaret had spoken the words hastily and unthinkingly. When Meg's nerves were on edge was the only time she was ever cross and out of temper. "The Iretons are delightful people. If I'd known Ireton when he was a bachelor, I should have visited them after his marriage, but I didn't, and I haven't much time for paying society calls. Besides, it might have looked like patronizing them. The way they were treated by some of the English out here was so abominable that one had to be jolly careful. Ireton never minded a scrap—he's too big to care for the social rot that goes on out here, but all the same, I didn't like to make a point of calling. I'm a digger, Meg, not a resident with a house to invite people to."

"From what Mike told me, they must be the most delightful people. I can't imagine Hadassah snubbing me if I went to see her, can you?"

"I don't suppose she would. What will you say to her? It's a rum idea." Freddy became meditative.

"I don't know, but whatever one arranges to say on such occasions is just the thing one doesn't say. The atmosphere will suggest the words—it always does with me. I've never yet said the things I planned to say. Have you?"

"Scarcely ever, but it might be well to think things out." Freddy disliked the idea of confiding family secrets to strangers. "When do you think of going?"

"When you leave here, I can go straight to Cairo. It will be cooler there. I don't know Cairo—don't forget, I've never seen even the Pyramids."

"And when do you mean to go home? The season's getting on."

"I don't know. It all depends on what news I can

gather, or if a letter comes. I can easily stay in Cairo until I hear. You won't object to that?"

"No. It's beastly hot here, by Jove!" Freddy poured himself out a lemon-squash and drank it off. "I'm not sorry it's time to go home."

"I don't feel the heat very much—the nights keep pretty cool."

"You're looking fagged, all the same."

"Oh, I'm all right—it's anxiety that kills. If only I was certain that he wasn't ill, Freddy!"

"I don't see why you should think Mike's ill. He's leading an awfully healthy life. He's well accustomed to the desert. It's cooler with him than it is here."

"I know, but it's a very strained life. I have a conviction that he's ill. Whenever I think intently of him, I see him ill and suffering. These things must have their meaning."

"I think we should have heard if he was ill. We got the other news quick enough, didn't we!"

Meg frowned.

"It will be cooler in Cairo, but give me your word that you personally won't do anything foolish in the way of looking for Michael, or going off alone into the desert."

"No, I won't do anything foolish. That's not in my line, is it now? I have some Lampton common sense."

"Not about some things."

Meg laughed. "Wait till you know what it is like, chum."

"Well, you'll not forget your other promise?"

Meg thought for a moment before answering and then she said emphatically, "No, I won't forget my promise. I'm not in the least afraid that I shall be tempted to break it."

"You have promised to go back to England if you find undeniable proof that Michael and Millicent were together in the desert."

"Yes, I promise. I will go back to the old life, which

seems like a dream. Meg gave a little shiver as she visualized her old-world Suffolk home and the narrowness of her life there. "Any old place would do, chum, to bury myself in if my heart was broken."

## CHAPTER XIII

THROUGH a labyrinth of narrow streets, echoing with native cries and Oriental traffic, a wonderful sight and sensation to strangers unfamiliar with Cairene commercial life, Margaret Lampton found her way to "the home of enchantment," as she afterwards called the Iretons' ancient mansion. It was a native house, typical and expressive of the most resplendent years of the Mameluke rule in Egypt.

A licensed guide, with a brass-lettered number on his arm, in a blue cotton jebba and a scarlet fez, had volunteered to show her the way; it would have been impossible for a stranger to find it alone. The Cairene licensed guides, although they are pests, have their uses.

As Margaret passed under the lintel of the outer door, which led into a quiet courtyard of Hadassah Ireton's house, a Nubian servant rose from the stone *mastaba*—the guards' seat—upon which he had been lying half asleep; he conducted her with the silence of a shadow to the gate of the inner or women's courtyard. This courtyard was overlooked by the women's quarters of the house only.

Margaret rather timidly entered the second courtyard. She scarcely knew what to expect. She was certainly not prepared for the vision of beauty which she saw directly the door was opened. She had heard nothing at all of the fantastic beauty of the superb old Mameluke palaces in Cairo; she did not know that the Iretons lived in one.

A fat servant, also a Nubian, but more amply clad than the guard at the outer door, rose from a wooden seat,

grown grey with age. With the same silence and mystery he conducted Margaret across the courtyard.

Margaret could, of course, only glance at the bewildering beauty of her mediæval surroundings as she followed the servant, but brief as her vision of it was, it left a never-to-be-forgotten picture in her mind. A vision of coolness and peace, of oriel windows—chamber-windows for unreal people, jealously screened with weather-bleached *meshrabiyeh* work—and one high balcony, the special feature of the courtyard, a dream of romantic beauty, shaded by the dark leaves of an ancient lebbek tree. It was a vision as dignified as it was touching. It was like a lost piece of a world which had passed away, a lonely cloud which had detached itself from a world of romance and had hidden itself in the heart of a seething city of ugliness and sin.

Surprise temporarily drove from Margaret's mind the object of her visit; it was not until she was seated in the spacious room which overlooked the courtyard, and whose front wall consisted of the *meshrabiyeh* balcony—it was now Hadassah Ireton's drawing-room—that she was brought face to face with the unusualness of her visit.

The room was beautifully cool, screened as it was by the delicate lace-work. *Meshrabiyeh* was invented to fill two wants—to screen the windows through which women could look out, without being seen themselves, and to admit fresh air while it excluded the sun. It is a substitute for glass in a warm climate.

Margaret would have liked to have sat for a little time longer to collect her thoughts and to take in the beauty of the room; but that was not to be; the door opened and her hostess entered.

Of all the beautiful pictures which she had seen since she entered the inner courtyard of this mediæval home, Hadassah Ireton was the most beautiful. She had brought her baby-boy with her; he was just learning to toddle. A sob rose in Margaret's throat, as she saw the fair-haired child beside the tall young mother.

Hadassah had greeted her with the conventional "How do you do?" Margaret answered it as conventionally.

Hadassah lifted her boy up and held him out to Margaret. "This is my son," she said. "I know he wants to welcome you."

The boy held up his face to be kissed. As he did so, Margaret took him in her arms and held him close to her breast. Hadassah, who had brought him to administer to that very want—a woman's empty arms—went to the balcony and made a pretense of letting in some fresh air and excluding the shaft of sunlight which was coming from one of the small oriels that had been left unclosed.

When she turned to her guest, she saw something very like tears in Margaret's eyes. The child, who did not know the meaning of the word fear or shyness, was speaking to Margaret as if he had known her all his short life.

"He has taken you into his elastic heart," Hadassah said. "Because, if you don't mind me saying so, I think we are rather like one another."

"Oh, no!" Margaret said impulsively, while she blushed. "I'm not like you!"

Her words were expressive of admiration. Hadassah did not pretend to misunderstand them; she was well accustomed to admiration.

"The boy sees the resemblance, I'm sure."

"We have both dark heads and we are both tall," Margaret said laughingly. "But there the likeness ends." She looked at Hadassah's eyes as she spoke and wished that she could believe that she was in the least like her. She had never seen such a beautiful expression in any woman's eyes before. Was she really the Syrian girl whom Michael Ireton had dared to marry?

"Let us sit down," Hadassah said. "But before we begin our talk, I must send Michael to the nursery. I am really so foolish about him—I wanted you to see him." She rang the bell and a pretty Coptic girl in native dress came into the room; the boy went off with her without demur.

The girl had looked at Margaret with big brown eyes; they carried her mind back to the portraits of Egyptian women painted in Roman times on the walls of tombs.

"What a good little chap!" Margaret said. "I'm sure he wanted to stay with you. How marked the Coptic type is!—they are the true descendants of the ancient Egyptians, aren't they? He looked so fair beside her."

"Dear little son! He will be perfectly happy with her. He loves everybody and everything. I sometimes wonder if it means a lack of character. He rarely cries, and he sings baby-songs to himself all day long."

"What a darling!" Margaret said. "And how fair!"

"Yes," Hadassah said, "quite English." The words were spoken without malice, but they brought the colour to Margaret's cheeks. Hadassah saw it, and said laughingly, "I was granted my wish—I wanted to have a boy as like my husband as possible. He wanted a girl, I think."

Margaret laid her hand on Hadassah's arm. "Did you mind me writing?" she said. "I hope you didn't think it very odd?" Her voice broke. "I wanted your advice. I knew you and your husband could help me."

"Dear Miss Lampton," Hadassah said, "I'm so glad you wrote, and of course I understood. It's worth while to have suffered oneself, so as to be able to understand and help others in their suffering."

Margaret knew all that the words implied, but with her habitual reserve, she answered as though Hadassah had referred to her cousin's death. The Nationalist plot in which he was implicated had added to the horror which British society in Cairo had openly expressed at Michael Ireton's marriage with a Syrian, who was a cousin of the ill-advised youth.

"Michael told me something of the tragedy," Margaret said. "You must have felt his death terribly."

Margaret's words were conventional, but Hadassah did not miss the sympathy and feeling which lay underneath them.

"I did," Hadassah said. "But the boy would never have been happy—he was one of the pitiful instances you meet in Egypt, of misguided idealists. Girgis had a fine character, but he was fastened upon because of his wealth by the wrong set of the Nationalist party, who misled him and then turned on him and killed him because he wouldn't go as far as they wanted him to go in their horrible outrages. It was a pitiful story, greatly distorted and misinterpreted by the press."

"His death was splendid," Margaret said. "It wiped out all the rest—it proved his real worth."

"Yes," Hadassah said. "Poor Girgis died a hero's death. He was as brave as a lion. But come," she said, "let me hear your news. These things we are talking about are ancient history to everybody but myself, and I never think of them if I can help it. It is better not." She sighed reflectively. "Dear Girgis knows that I can never forget him. He gave me all his fierce young love at a time when it was very precious."

"Ignorance was at the bottom of it all," Margaret said. She was alluding to the behaviour of the British residents in Cairo in respect to Hadassah's marriage. Hadassah understood.

"I have learned to know and realize that," she said. "And, after all, one must pity ignorance. I have got so far that I can actually feel sorry for such narrow minds. As for Michael, he never gave it a thought. If our characters are widened through suffering, I have gained—they have lost. Something fine always leaves our natures when we do or think unkind things—nothing is truer or surer than that."

"Michael always says the same thing," Margaret said eagerly. "He thinks unkind thoughts and uncharitable acts —want of love, in fact—the unpardonable sins."

"Both our men have the same name." Hadassah's eyes smiled. "I like your man so much, if I may say so. He is worth a great deal. We can't expect big things to come to us in a small, mediocre way, can we?"

"I am so glad you like him," Margaret said. "And you believe in him? Your husband believes in him, in his . . ." she hesitated ". . . unpractical mind?" Hadassah's understanding and gentleness made her feel childishly weak. It would have been a relief to give way to weeping. Her nerves were at the point when any rebuke would have braced her; sympathy was undoing.

"Why, of course!"

"May I tell you why I came?"

"Will you have some tea first? You are tired!"

"No thanks, really. I had numerous cups of coffee on my way here."

"Then let me hear all you want to tell me. Even if I can't help you, I know how nice it is to talk over one's troubles with another woman. You have lived very much cut off from women's society all these months. Where is Mr. Amory? Did he go into the desert? We haven't heard of him or from him since he spoke to my husband about going off on a long journey. He had a great scheme in his head. He's an odd creature." She laughed. "You and I both like individualities, I think."

"He went into the eastern desert soon after you saw him. I haven't heard from him since he went. His letters may have gone astray. But in the meantime a report has been spread abroad that he has taken a woman with him, a Mrs. Mervill. Have you heard of her?"

"Millicent Mervill? I know her!"

"Well, she is in love with him. You know how beautiful she is. . . ." Margaret's voice lost its steadiness.

"Yes, and also I know how thoroughly lacking in morals. She is very well-known by this time. Last season she was the fashion; she entertained lavishly. This year she has thrown caution to the winds."

"She certainly has, for she has positively hunted Michael to earth."

"Michael Amory, of all men!" Hadassah's laugh en-

couraged Margaret; it was so expressive of what she herself felt.

"Yes, I think she is annoyed because. . . ." Margaret paused ". . . well, I can't express what I mean, but Michael isn't that sort. He would be her friend if she would let him, but friendship isn't enough."

"I know what you mean. He certainly isn't that sort, there can be no mistaking that."

Margaret smiled happily. "Then you believe he isn't?"

"Of course! Who doesn't?"

"My brother objects to my name being mixed up in the scandal." Margaret had evaded answering Hadassah's question.

"But what scandal?"

"The reports that are going about that Mrs. Mervill is with him in the desert, that that is why I haven't heard from Mike. Everyone is saying it." Meg's words conveyed an apology for her brother.

"Your brother really believes this, and yet he knows Mr. Amory?"

"Yes. But you mustn't blame him. He has tried not to believe it; he is really awfully good about it all. And I must admit that it looks as if the story was true, but I just know it isn't."

"Of course it isn't!" Hadassah said, almost sharply. "Who spread the report?"

"First it came from the native diggers in the valley, and then my brother heard it from Mr. King. Now lots of people are talking about it, and my brother wants me to go home. . . . I've promised to go if . . ." Margaret paused. "That's why I came to you. I want your advice. If we could only hear from Michael, I know the whole thing would be explained. My brother would do anything he could to help me, but his business ties him and . . ." again she paused and then said hurriedly, "You know what men are—he hates my name being bandied about."

"I'll get my husband to comb out the truth from all

these lies." Hadassah put her hand on Margaret's. "You'll laugh at your fears one day."

"If you only knew how thoughtless Michael is about the opinion of the world! If he isn't doing wrong, he never stops to think what construction the world may be putting on his action, nor does he care."

"Personally I think it's the malicious talk of some enemy, or of Mrs. Mervill herself. Can she have intercepted his letters, and spread the report so as to separate you?"

"She may have followed him. If she is with him, she is self-invited."

Hadassah Ireton interrupted her. "Even Mrs. Mervill could scarcely do that!"

"My brother says that I may wait in Cairo until we can find definite proofs one way or another. A letter may come from Michael at any moment. I know it will come if he is all right, but I'm so afraid he is ill—that is really what I came to ask you about."

"You want us to try to find out if he is ill?"

"Yes, if you will, if it is not asking too much. Something keeps on telling me that he is ill, that he is in need of help." Margaret was speaking more earnestly and with less restraint. "I have had queer visions and many presentiments since I lived in the Valley. I seem to be able to see beyond . . . if you know what I mean. They have come true in many instances; it is not mere imagination. But perhaps you have as little belief as I once had in these things?"

"Where ought Mr. Amory to be just now—have you any idea?" Hadassah's voice conveyed the idea to Margaret that the subject was too serious to be spoken of hastily or decisively.

"He ought to have reached his destination, the hills beyond the ruins of Tel-el-Amarna. Did you know the object of his journey?" Margaret spoke nervously, shyly; she shrank from speaking of her lover's belief in the treasure of Akhnaton.

"Yes. He told my husband the twofold reason of his wish to make the journey. He believes in the theory that there is a buried treasure in the hills beyond Tel-el-Amarna, where Akhnaton was buried, and I think he also wanted . . . what shall I say? . . . to find himself—I suppose I must use that hackneyed phrase for want of a better—to find himself in the desert. Wasn't that it?"

"Yes. He is a born wanderer." Margaret said the words dreamily; her thoughts had flown to the luminous figure of Akhnaton. In this superb mansion, fashioned by Oriental genius and Eastern wealth and imagination, her vision took its place, not unnaturally, in the strange list of things which her eyes had seen or her mind had received during her life in Egypt.

"Will you enjoy a wandering life? Don't you think women like a home?"

"With an intellectual companion any place is home; with a stupid one a palace becomes a wilderness. I have learnt that in the desert, if I have learnt nothing else, I think. Michael could make a real home out of a bathing-machine and a box of books." She laughed. "He is never dull, he doesn't know the meaning of the word bored. His only trouble is that no day is long enough. He'd forget the dimensions of the bathing-machine—it would become to him a beautiful house like this."

"What a wonderful thing love is!" Hadassah said to herself, as she watched Margaret's eyes glow and shine. Her thoughts had transformed her. "A wonderful and beautiful thing! Whatever would the world be without it? And yet there are some people who go through life without the faintest idea of what it really means!"

"What we three have got to do," she said aloud, "is to discover where the wanderer is. The sooner he is found the sooner he can start life in a bathing-box. I agree with you so far that I think it's more than likely that he is ill—not necessarily seriously ill, but ill enough to have been delayed on his journey. Still, that is not the only solution

of the problem. His letters may be lying in some native post-office. I've known letters remain for weeks on end in out-of-the-way village post-offices. The official can't read the address; he puts the letter aside until someone comes along who can. It may be sooner, it may be later; they eventually reach their destination."

Margaret smiled. "Michael's writing is not too clear—that may be the cause of the delay."

"My husband has received letters which have been months on a journey which should have taken days. Time means nothing to desert peoples, as you know."

"You have made me feel much happier," Margaret said brightly. She could have kissed the beautiful woman by her side out of sheer gratitude.

For some time longer they discussed the subject more fully and laid their plans.

Suddenly Hadassah said, "Where are you staying in Cairo?"

When Margaret told her the name of her hotel, she said, "You must come to us. We have lots of spare room in this big house, and if you are here we can work together so much better. The hotel is too public. It would really give us great pleasure if you will. I feel sure it would be wiser."

"How kind of you to ask me!" Margaret said. "I am quite a stranger to you! I'd love to come. Michael has told me something about your work among the Copts—indeed, everyone speaks of it, of your new educational scheme and the progress you have made in so short a time. I should like to understand more about it, if I may."

"Perhaps our minds have met many times before, for I think we are scarcely strangers," Hadassah said. "I hope you don't feel towards me as one?"

Margaret looked pleased. "I have heard so much about you, about your work."

"It is very uphill work. You can only hope for very slow results amongst a people who have been scorned and persecuted and rejected for generations and generations. I, as

a Syrian, know what social persecution means, so it is my highest ambition to do what little I can, with my husband's help and my father's wealth, to elevate the ideals and the moral standard of the young Coptic girls. You can do nothing, or next to nothing, with the older women. Their characters are formed, their prejudices too deeply-rooted."

"I suppose so. It is the same in India—the women there are the bitterest opponents to the reforms for women. They cling to the suffering and oppression they endure."

"These Copts have absorbed so many of the worst features of the Mohammedan civilization—their superstitions, their domestic customs as regards the women, and a great many of their least desirable religious ceremonies. It is hard, for instance, for a stranger to distinguish between a Christian native's marriage or funeral and a Moslem's—indeed, it is often not easy even if you have a lifelong knowledge of the country. The finest qualities of Islam—and they are many—they have rejected, and for so doing they have suffered unthinkable hardships and persecutions. Bad as things are to-day, they were far, far worse in the days before the British Occupation, when the Christians were at the mercy of the fanatical Moslems."

"It is such a pity that the native Christian population is the one which no one trusts in this country. The Mohammedans are respected, the Copts are despised. I find that, even in connection with my brother's work. The brains and industry of the country seem to belong to the Copts; the honour and reliability to the Moslems."

"I know," Hadassah said. "And that's what my husband and I are fighting against. He wants to prove that the people of any country and of any religion, even the English," Hadassah's eyes twinkled, "will become degraded and untrustworthy in time, if they are persecuted and oppressed. With the Christian element in Egypt, it has been a case of every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. If we were to take some Coptic children and Mohammedan children, of the same social grade out here, and

had them educated in England as Christians, you would soon see that it is not the Copts who ought to be despised, but their intolerant oppressors and persecutors." Hadassah smiled. "You know, Miss Lampton, how easy it is to be good and strong when one is trusted and loved. Love makes finer, better women of us."

Margaret rose from her seat. "You have done me so much good," she said. "I feel as if my world had been re-made."

"That's splendid!" Hadassah said. "I always try to remember that it is a privilege to suffer. It is one of the divine fires which tests us; suffering links us to the great brotherhood. You wouldn't choose to be outside it. The older we grow the more we realize that it is suffering, not happiness, which makes the whole world kin."

Margaret's silence, which often was more eloquent than other women's speech, told Hadassah that she agreed. Suffering was teaching her its lessons.

"When may we expect you?" Hadassah said. "The sooner the better, don't you think?"

"May I come in a day or two? I have some business to do for my brother—I have promised to see one or two people for him; he is going home very soon." She looked round the hall through which they were passing. "I can't imagine myself ever really living here. It looks as if it had all been created by the wand of some magician for a princess in a fairytale. What a contrast to our hut in the Valley!"

"You like it better than a new house in the European settlement? You think I chose wisely?"

"Of course I do. Who wouldn't?"

"This house costs us no more than a good flat would in the European part of the city, but you have to come through the native quarters to get to it, remember. Many people would object to that."

"I hate the European quarter of Cairo," Margaret said. "It seems to me so vulgar and degenerate. The native

quarter is just what it sets out to be, no better and no worse."

"Well, you must come and stay with us—my husband will enjoy showing you the hidden beauties of Cairo. He is devoted to it."

Margaret's ears caught the sound of water. It was coming from a tall fountain which was playing in the centre of the outer hall. Above it was a pendentive roof, richly carved and coloured. A suggestion of turquoise-blue and the gleam of iridescent tiles showed through the clear water in the octagonal basin set in the floor. The jets of water came from a large ball of blue faience resting on the top of a slender spiral column. The fountain was only one of the beautiful features of that Eastern mansion which Margaret noticed as her hostess conducted her to the inner courtyard.

"How enchanting it all is!" Margaret said. "I feel much too prosaic to imagine spending my everyday working hours in it." Her life in the hut seemed better suited to her practical nature.

"I love it," Hadassah said. "And I like its emptiness. That is the native idea. We have tried not to make it look like a mediæval museum, not to stuff it up with things. It's a great temptation."

"Its sense of space is its greatest charm. There is everything you can possibly want in it, and yet it has none of the absurd knick-knacks and useless lumber of Western houses. My brother and I have learned to do without so much that I don't think we shall ever fall into the sin of overcrowding our rooms again."

Hadassah laughed. "Will you have the courage to burn family relics?—Aunt Maria's uncomfortable ottoman, Aunt Elizabeth's escritoire, which is too small to write at, and Aunt Anne's firescreen with strawberries worked in beadwork?"

"Oh, I know them all," Margaret said. "Just compare them to these beautiful things!"

"Don't forget," Hadassah said, "that you are comparing the things of England's worst period to the things of the finest period in Cairo. If you saw some of the native houses, furnished from the European store in the Ezbekiyeh, you would think Queen Victoria's private apartments at Osborne beautiful." Hadassah's voice expressed her meaning.

"Good-bye," Margaret said laughingly. "It is hard to believe that, but I take your word for it."

As Margaret walked through the outer courtyard, she kept saying to herself, "So that is the Syrian's daughter, the girl whom the English people rejected and would have none of!"

Freddy had often corrected his sister for her careless use of the word "beautiful." He maintained that few people had ever seen a really beautiful human being. The Greeks idealized their models in their types of Venus and Apollo. Margaret felt that at last she could truthfully tell him that she had seen a beautiful woman, and that that woman was a Syrian, Michael Ireton's "wife out of Egypt."

## CHAPTER XIV

When Margaret reached her hotel she was more than astonished to hear that in her absence her brother had called to see her. He had left a message to say that he would return in half an hour.

"How long ago was that?" Margaret asked.

The very grand servant, in his elaborately-embroidered and gold laced native dress, said, "About twenty minutes ago, my lady. The gentleman said that it was important that he should see you."

"I will wait for him on the terrace," Margaret said. "Bring him to me directly he arrives."

She was so taken back by this inexplicable piece of news

that she heard nothing more of what the man said. Why on earth had Freddy come to Cairo? Margaret knew that he had business which was to have kept him four more days at least in Luxor. Her first thought was that he had heard something about Michael, but she doubted if even that would have made him neglectful of his duty. With Freddy his work and the responsibility it entailed came before every other consideration. Margaret had ever been mindful of the fact that her presence in the camp was not to interfere with his work. She knew him so well, or she fancied that she did. His coming must be in some way connected with his work. Perhaps he wished to stop her carrying out the instructions which he had given her; he might have learned something in Luxor which had upset his plans.

A few minutes before the half-hour was up, Margaret saw her brother walking quickly towards the hotel. The moment she caught sight of him, she left the terrace and hurried down the street to meet him. There was no one else within sight. He was walking with his head bent and as though he was deeply immersed in thought.

When she got within speaking distance, she called out, "Oh, Freddy, what is it? Why have you come?"

His expression had convinced her that something was wrong, that something very serious had brought him to Cairo.

Freddy linked his arm in his sister's and took a deep breath before he spoke. "Chum, dear," he said, "I've brought bad news for you."

"Michael's dead!" Meg stood still and dropped her brother's arm. It was a pitiful face, that paled to the lips as her eyes gazed into Freddy's.

"No, Meg, Mike's not dead."

"Then he's dying, and you're afraid to tell me!" Margaret strode forward, as if she was then and there starting off to find her dying lover. Freddy laid his hand on her arm. "Freddy, let me go!" she said impatiently. "Take

me to him quickly. Wild horses won't detain me!" She shook off his hand.

"Steady, old girl. Let me tell you all about it. Mike's quite well, so far as I know. I've heard nothing about any illness."

"Then what's the matter? More lies? Hadassah Ireton doesn't believe a word of them! She is an angel—she is going to help me." Meg's head dropped; her chest rose and fell with suppressed emotion.

"Don't walk so quickly, Meg. I can't tell you while you dash on like that. Have some pity on me—I hate my job."

Meg fell back. "Well, tell me—out with it!"

"The Government has got wind of the 'site.' Michael's discovery has been anticipated. Experimentary digging has begun."

"And where is Mike?" Meg's eyes blazed.

"That is just it! He ought to have reached the hills two weeks ago, at least. While he has been idling, someone has played him false—betrayed him—informed the Government for the sake of the reward."

Meg gave a little cry. It lashed Freddy to fury against Michael; it was the cry of a crucified soul.

"It's just his casual drifting again!"

"But you didn't believe in the treasure!" Meg's loyalty was up in arms against Freddy's voice of accusation.

"I know I didn't, and it's yet got to be proved that it is there. But the fact remains that I heard from the Director of Public Works that a temporary camp has been pitched on the very site Mike was going for. The whole story is a complication of truth and fiction."

Meg spoke with difficulty. The agony at her heart was choking her. "Why have they suddenly sent excavators to that particular spot, if there is nothing there?"

"On the strength of the information given by a native."

"And what had the native found? Isn't it just too diabolical and wicked?"

"It's jolly hard lines, but if Mike had gone there straight

and as quickly as he could, if he hadn't played the idiot, he'd have been there before the native who has betrayed him."

While Freddy was speaking, thoughts came to Meg of her vision of Akhnaton, of the strange and occult incidents connected with the story of the hidden treasure.

"What do you mean by playing the fool?" she said. "Have you heard from Michael? Have you any reliable ground for supposing that he played the fool?" Meg's voice was beautifully scornful.

"I've heard again, that Millicent was with him. The facts are undeniable. The whole thing makes me furious. Why couldn't he have written to me and told me, if she followed him, as you suggested? His silence condemns him."

"It makes me more than furious." Meg's voice was horrible in Freddy's ears; it was older, shriller, cruelly defiant. "It makes me furious to think how easily evil is believed of the absent, who can't defend themselves."

They strode along. Both were walking blindly forward.

"It makes me sick, sick, sick!" She flung the words out and then broke into a little cry. "Oh, Freddy, have you no faith? no trust? Is that your friendship?"

"What can I do?" he said. "I'm not blinded with love as you are. I see things dispassionately. I want to do what is best for you. Why hasn't he written? I'm quite willing to believe what Michael tells me—I don't doubt his word—but he has said nothing. This is another example of his weakness."

"Do you believe that Millicent is still with him?"

"Her dragoman who took her into the desert has returned to Luxor. I haven't seen him—he could tell us everything we want to know."

"The news came from him?" Meg's voice was a stinging reproach.

"Yes. He only remained in Luxor a few hours; he was going to his home in Assiut, but he spread the story."

There was a pause.

"He took Millicent to Michael?"

"He took her into the desert; they met."

"And because we have had no word from Michael, no explanation, you are ready to condemn him?" Meg's words were loyal, while her heart was torn with jealousy.

"Meg," said Freddy gently, "will you go home to England?"

"No." The word came sharply, abruptly.

"You promised, old girl."

"I never promised to accept the words of a dragoman against my own knowledge of Michael, against my conscience. I have another promise to keep, my promise of absolute trust."

"The dragoman can have no object in lying, and added to his report, there is the fact that if Michael had not dallied for some reason or another, he would have reached the hills long before this. He has allowed the Government to anticipate him."

"Freddy, I believe in God, and He has told me that Michael is as true to me as I am to him."

"Poor old girl!" Freddy said tenderly. "You're such a loyal old thing."

But Meg rounded on him; she was a truer Lampton than she ever suspected. "Oh, don't 'poor' me, Freddy! I can't bear it. It sounds as if I were half an imbecile, or as if Michael was a villain! I've got my wits all right—and Egypt has given me super-wits. It has shown me things beyond. If there is such a thing as conscience, then I should be sinning against mine if I doubted my lover for one instant."

"But didn't you say that the Lampton pride would not be wanting when you really discovered that Mike had taken Millicent with him?"

"And it won't be wanting, if either Mike or Millicent tell me with their own lips that they have been together on this journey. I'll start off home by the next boat."

"Oh, do be reasonable, Meg! You won't see either of them. If this thing has happened, they'll keep out of the way. That's why they are keeping silence."

"You are asking me to accept circumstantial evidence of what I call the lowest order—dragoman's gossip. Well, I simply say I won't do it."

"What about the time he has taken to reach the hills?"

"I don't pretend to understand. Mike will explain when he gets a chance. I only know that he wouldn't believe a word of the story if he heard that I had been away with six good-looking men who admired me."

Freddy gave a mirthless laugh. "There is safety in numbers, Meg. If he had the evidence you have, I wonder what he'd feel?"

"Just what I feel. I have seen Hadassah Ireton. Her husband will help me. He knew Mike; they planned this journey together."

"I wish you'd leave things alone. I asked you to."

"I can't. Michael may be ill."

"It doesn't sound like it. Bad news travels quickly."

"Look here, Freddy," Margaret said, "you haven't the slightest idea of what it feels like to be in love. When you do you will understand. What a lot you have still to learn! You won't believe any old lie that comes along about the girl you have vowed to trust and whom you believe in as you believe in your God. As lovers we Lamptons don't deal in half measures."

"Then are you going to remain in Cairo indefinitely, waiting and waiting for Michael to come back to you, when he is away fooling with another woman?"

"Don't kill me, Freddy! I can't stand much more." A sob burst from Meg's lips. "All that's best in me trusts in Michael and all that is bad doubts and distrusts. It's the bad that is killing me. Do you understand? For pity's sake, if you care for me, don't add to the evil, don't give it the upper hand. Freddy, I need you, I need some trust to add to mine!"

"I'd kill myself if it would help you, you know I would!"

"Yes, I know it, of course I know it. I just go mad when you doubt him, Freddy, I see red. I could kill you. It's because your doubts feed my evil thoughts. I can't explain, but I know what I mean myself."

"I want to save you further pain, Meg."

"Hadassah Ireton said, which is quite true, that it is sometimes a privilege to suffer. If only you, Freddy, won't doubt Mike, I can endure almost anything. You're just a bit of myself. I can't bear you to doubt. It's like myself doubting and forgetting, forgetting the most beautiful thing in my life."

They had wandered on until they had come to the Nile Bridge. The sight of the tall masts of the native boats, silhouetted against the crimson of the evening sky, reminded Freddy that already they had gone too far. He stopped abruptly.

"We must drive back, Meg, as quickly as we can. I've my train to catch. We shall only just do it."

"Did you come to Cairo on purpose to see me?"

Freddy had signalled to a cab—an open landau, of ancient and decayed splendour, driven by two white horses. They came dashing up at a wild gallop. The native driver, in his red fez and white cotton jacket, barely gave Freddy time to jump into the carriage after Meg was seated when, with a noisy cracking of his whip, he urged the horses to a still more reckless speed.

"I had to come. I was afraid you might get the news in some horrible way. You've been a brick, but you can't think how I dreaded telling you."

"I've not been a brick. I've been horrid. I am always horrid nowadays." Meg's voice was contrite and humble.

"I like you for it. We understand each other."

"You're the dearest and best brother on earth, Freddy, and you know I think so, and yet I speak as if I hated you!"

"We're chums," he said, as he put his hand on the top of

Margaret's. After that conversation became impossible. The horses were going at a mad pace, through crowded, noisy streets. Margaret was a little nervous, but she realized that there was only just time for Freddy to catch his train, if he allowed the coachman to take his own way, to drive in the arrogant native style. Every other minute she felt sure that they would run over a child or dog, or knock down a foot passenger. It seemed to be the privilege of anyone who could afford to pay for a cab to drive over pedestrians if they got in the way; the humble poor were of less account than the dust beneath the horses' feet. The coachman's absurd cries to "clear the way" pierced Margaret's ears without amusing her, while the cracking of the whip almost drove her to despair. The noise and crowd of idle human beings was bewildering to her nerves after the silence of the desert.

At last they reached the station, where they had to say good-bye hurriedly and regretfully.

"I'll let you know," Margaret said, "what Michael Ireton advises. Remember, I'm all right. Don't worry. You've been a dear. It was awfully good of you to come."

"Good-bye, old girl," he said. "Take care of yourself."

. . . . . .

As Meg walked back to her hotel, she comforted herself with the assurance that Michael Ireton would find some way to help her. She visualized to herself repeatedly the personality of Hadassah and her expression of absolute confidence in Michael Amory's loyalty and honour. Her finer senses told her that it was natures like Hadassah's, natures keenly sensitive to purity and uprightness, which could judge people like Mike justly. The magnet of righteousness draws kindred souls together. If Hadassah had doubted, then indeed she might have listened to Freddy's counsel. Freddy was just and splendid in his way, but Margaret did not blind herself to the fact that his knowledge of human nature, even though it was singularly correct in most instances, was derived from a more material

source of evidence. His judgment was governed by his practical common sense rather than by his super-senses. Hadassah's nature was tuned to the inner consciousness of human beings, as a musician's ear is tuned to the harmonies and discords of music, even to the hundredth part of a tone.

If a woman like Hadassah had doubted Michael, or given a moment's thought to the gossip of the dragoman, Margaret's faith might have been troubled. But as matters stood at present, she knew that she herself had a finer understanding of Michael than Freddy possessed, in spite of his years, as compared to her own months of friendship. She tried to strengthen herself against the invasion of unhappy thoughts by thinking over in her mind all the various objects of beauty she had seen in the Iretons' house. The picture of the cool courtyard, with the dark-leaved lebbek-tree reaching up to the romantic balcony, brought a smile to her lips. It was such an ideal setting for an Eastern Romeo and Juliet. Busy as she knew the Iretons' life to be, their mediæval home suggested the repose and the charm and the romance of Love in Idleness!

## CHAPTER XV

To assure herself of her complete confidence in the arguments which she had used to Freddy and of her own heart's happiness, as a thing widely apart from her anxiety, Margaret dressed herself in her most becoming frock that same evening for her first appearance at the hotel *table d'hôte*. She sat at a little table by herself in the enormous dining-room. The season was far advanced; the tourists in Egypt had all returned to Cairo, there to disperse to their various countries.

There were many fair and attractive women in the room, of widely varied types—Americans, Austrians and English;

that was how they took their place in the scale of beauty in Margaret's opinion. Amongst them all there was perhaps no one who was more commented upon and admired than herself. Sitting by herself, for one thing, provoked curiosity, while for another her claim to good looks had the high quality of distinguished individuality; in an assembly of well-dressed women of the world, Margaret, like Hadassah, could never be overlooked.

She had been out of the world of fashion and frivolity for so long that the gay scene interested her and made it easy for her to temporarily put aside her troubles. She had lived in the Valley, studying the lives and customs of lost civilizations until they had become a part of her own life. Now she found it amusing to be back again amongst the men and women of to-day, people who were, as she reminded herself, in their own little way creating history. They were as typical of the world's evolution in the twentieth century as the Pharaohs in their tombs and the painted figures of men and women and dancing girls on the temple and tomb-walls were typical of the world's evolution three thousand years ago.

After dinner she drank her coffee in the fine lounge of the hotel, under tall palm-trees, while a Hungarian band played music which stirred her blood and pulses. It made her feel very much alone and a little desolate. She had been happier before the music began; it made calls upon her heart, it gave re-birth to a thousand wants. Her sense of loneliness increased as she watched more than one pair of lovers gradually drift off and settle themselves down somewhere out of sight. She heard one radiant couple making arrangements for going to see the Pyramids by moonlight.

She had never seen the Pyramids or the Sphinx. Perhaps when she was staying with the Iretons, they would take her to see them. She had certainly no desire to make the excursion alone.

As she thought of the Pyramids, and Mike's association

with them, a wave of hate and rage spread over Margaret like a blush. She wondered if any of the curious eyes of the tourists had noticed it; she had been conscious of being freely criticized all the evening. She looked about her quickly. The place had become almost devoid of young people; only some elderly men and women were left, reclining in big chairs. With the absence of youth, Margaret's spirits sank very low; it was not bracing to her strained nerves and lonely condition to sit with the elderly invalids and watch them passing the time away in a semi-dozing condition until it was the recognized hour for going to bed.

To be true to Michael she must not allow herself to grow despondent. Hadassah Ireton had gone through far greater trials and suffering than she was facing, and what had been her reward? Margaret visualized her married life, her expression of happiness as she greeted her, her pride in the small son who was toddling at her side. It was a condition of life well worth suffering and waiting for.

When the clock struck ten, Margaret rose from her retired seat. She felt justified in going early to bed after such a long and trying day. There was nothing better to do. As she entered the lift which was to take her up to her floor, she suddenly found herself face to face with Millicent Mervill.

She was so wholly unprepared for the meeting that she never afterwards was able to understand why she did not lose her presence of mind. It is on such occasions that the metal we are made of is put to the test.

The two women faced each other in silence. The next moment the lift went swiftly up, and as it went, Margaret had but one clear thought—that she would stop at the first floor and get out; she could walk up the remaining flight of stairs. The next second she realized that that would be a foolish and weak thing to do. It was her duty to speak to Millicent and learn the cause of the scandal from her own lips. She owed it to Michael. She must do the one thing

which she could to clear his name of the dishonour of which Freddy accused him.

Millicent was getting out at the first landing. The lift shot up so quickly that the silence between them had been of the briefest. Margaret left the lift at the same moment and again the two women stood facing one another, as the gate closed behind them and the lift began its downward journey.

"Good evening," Millicent said gaily. "I never expected to have the pleasure of seeing you in Cairo." A smile which might have hidden any meaning lit up her eyes and showed the perfection of her mouth and teeth. But even at that critical moment, Margaret was conscious that her beauty had lost something of its radiance. Had her youth, which had seemed eternal, vanished at last? Had it left her as rats leave a sinking ship? Had the gods recalled what had already tarried too long?"

"Good evening," was all that Margaret managed to say. Her heart was floundering in a sea of anger; her mind was struggling for wise words, words which would drag the truth from the pretty lips, playing over still prettier teeth. She was determined not to let the opportunity slip.

But Millicent was too quick. She left Margaret no chance to take the lead in the conversation; she seized and kept it to the end. Margaret should know just as much as she, Millicent, wished her to know, and no more. She meant to enjoy herself; the devout Margaret was going to receive some nasty knocks.

"How is our mystic?" she asked lightly.

The word "our" instantly deprived Meg of her resolution to speak tactfully and even hypocritically, if it was necessary. Millicent did not wait for her tardy answer. Meg's expression had flamed the devil's fire of mischief in her callous heart.

"Have you heard from him since I left him?"

Here Margaret's pride helped her. She threw up her chin, a trick with her when her fighting spirit was roused.

"I really don't know. I forget how long ago it is since you saw him."

"I left him almost within sight of his promised land, of his King Solomon's mine. Has he found it? Were the jewels very wonderful?"

The woman's audacity amazed Margaret, while it infuriated her, but thanks to the blood of her ancestors, a fight always braced her nerves and quickened her wits; it was tenderness which brought tears. She was not going to allow the brazen little beast to know or see what her words meant to her; she was not going to tell her of Michael's disappointment. If she had betrayed him and robbed him of Akhnaton's treasure, she was not going to let her batten on the suffering she had caused, so she said:

"My brother has just heard that information of the discovery has come to the Minister of Public Works. The Government has sent out some men to make the preliminary excavations, so I suppose it is all right."

Millicent's eyes gleamed. Something like sympathy and pleasure beautified them; for a moment her desire to wound the girl who had robbed her of the lover she desired was forgotten; it was lost in surprise.

"Then Mike was right? He had really discovered his precious treasure, his legacy of Akhnaton? I'm so glad!" She paused. "I never really believed he would, did you? It seemed to me mere moonshine, a delightful excuse for a desert romance."

Margaret was still more amazed. What an actress the woman was! If she had not known her true character, she would have believed that she was innocent of the base treachery of which she was guilty.

"Yes, it would appear so," she said coldly. "But we know very little—we have only had the official news of the discovery. His letters will tell us more. Does the news surprise you?"

Millicent looked at Margaret keenly. Their eyes met as bitter antagonists. Millicent supposed that Margaret

thought that Michael would have written to her and told her the news; she answered accordingly.

"His breathless letters—you know how he writes—are probably resting in some desert village. They'll come along all right. But I'm awfully glad the dear man hasn't found a mare's nest, aren't you? She spoke again quickly, before Margaret had time to answer. "What does your brother say about it? Isn't he surprised? He thought it was all tommy-rot, didn't he? How different they are?"

"It is always difficult to tell what Freddy thinks," Margaret said. "He is a very reserved person. If the whole thing turns out as Michael expected, he will be delighted and interested."

"If there is anything there at all," Millicent said, "that ought to be sufficient proof of the seer's powers—I mean, things of Akhnaton's period. The portable treasure might have been stolen—it probably was. If the saint had discovered it, why not others?"

"I have had no particulars," Meg said coldly. She felt certain that Millicent was pumping her for her own pleasure.

"Your brother never mentioned the King Solomon's mine of gold and the jewels," Millicent said laughingly; "yet even my men were talking about it quite openly on my homeward journey. Mike and I were so careful—we never mentioned a word about it. To all outward appearances we were merely journeying in the desert for pleasure; our objective was to be the tomb where Akhnaton's body was buried. They must have learned all about it from the holy man—tents have ears. You have heard all about our meeting with the 'child of God,' of course?" She searched Margaret's eyes as she spoke and then added lightly: "I should like to have seen Mike in his strange counting-house, counting out his money, shouldn't you?"

Margaret very nearly said, "You little liar, get out of my sight!" The sudden temptation to shake her was almost past enduring; it was all she could do to keep her

hands off her and remain silent. She had heard from the woman's own lips what she had told Freddy she never would hear; her promise to him flashed through her mind. Her doom was sealed. The psychological and archæological interest of what Millicent had told her did not penetrate her brain; even her reference to their meeting with a "child of God" fell on deaf ears. Millicent had asked her if she had shared Michael's beliefs in the occult and mystic interpretation of the discovery, in tones which implied that she did not expect Margaret to understand or sympathize with that side of Michael Amory's character.

Margaret managed to keep her wits about her. The agony which she was enduring must at all costs be hidden from her enemy.

With a calm that surprised her own ears, she said. "Did you enjoy your time in the desert? Why did you return before the eventful discovery? If you had waited, you would have seen Mr. Amory wading in the historic jewels."

Millicent was very quick. She had arranged in her own mind how much and how little she was going to tell Margaret. It was to be enough to ruin her happiness and trust in her lover, enough to rob Michael of the woman who had robbed her of him; but not enough to let her know why she, Millicent, had flown from the camp.

"Oh, we both loved it!" she said. "We had some unique and strange experiences, things we shall never forget. But I had to come back, my time was up. I am leaving for England on the twenty-eighth—I have so much to pack and collect."

"It is getting very warm" Margaret said. "The tourists are all going back."

"Oh, I never mind the heat—I like it—but unfortunately I have to go home—money matters. I've been rather lucky, in a manner—a rich relation in Australia died a few months ago and I have just heard that he has left me a nice little bit."

Millicent's words instantly confirmed Margaret's suspi-

cions. The unscrupulous woman had secured at least a part of the buried gold. Margaret wondered if it would be wise to attack her on the subject. She refrained; instinct cautioned her. With Margaret it was always a case of—When in doubt, hold your tongue.

"What a fortunate coincidence!" she said coldly. "How very odd!"

Millicent looked at her sharply. What did her words mean? What was she driving at? Margaret never spoke unthinkingly.

"I don't understand what coincidence you refer to, but certainly I've been lucky as regards legacies and money. I've always been fortunate about money, but there is a saying that money goes where money is, and that if you get one legacy you will get three. I really could have done without the last windfall. I have enough of this world's goods for a lone woman—if I had some babies it would be different."

There was a note of sadness in Millicent's words which would have appealed to Margaret if she had not known what a perfect actress the woman was. How was she to believe anything she said after what she had done?

"You needn't let it be a burden to you." Margaret pretended to laugh. "There are other people's babies who have none. There are plenty of ways of disposing of super-wealth. Why not pay for the costs of some of the Egyptian exploration work next autumn? It would interest you and . . ." Margaret paused. ". . . it would be a suitable way of spending the gold. It would repay Mr. Amory."

In saying these words, Margaret felt that she was going as near to the point as she dared. As she said them, Millicent's eyes hardened. She had spoken with sincerity when she said that she could have done without her uncle's fortune, for there were moments when she deceived herself into believing that if her grand passion for Michael had been returned, that if she had ever been loved as greatly as she

felt that she herself could love, or if she had had any children, she would have been a good and noble woman. No chance of goodness had ever come her way, and she had never stepped aside to look for it.

"I don't know about repaying Mike," she said coldly. "There are some things which can never be repaid or bought." Meg certainly got as good as she had given. "I never meant to suggest that I had so much wealth that it would be a burden to me. I think I shall find some way of spending it enjoyably." She turned to the left wing of the corridor; her bedroom lay there. "Now I must say good-night," she said, still more coolly. "I have a great deal to do." She looked down at her dress. "My luggage has never come on from Luxor—it's such a nuisance. I had to wear a 'dug-out' to-night, a blouse and skirt I wore in the desert. They have lain packed all that time—I never thought I should have to wear them again." As she spoke, she visualized her last evening in the camp, when she had given Hassan her instructions for their flitting. She had worn the blouse that same evening.

"It looks very nice," Margaret said carelessly.

"Oh, it's terrible! I didn't venture to come down to *table d'hôte* in it—I dined in my room. Good-night."

"You still wear your eye of Horus?" Margaret said; she had noticed the amulet the moment she saw Millicent in the lift.

"Of course! It is my most treasured possession."

Margaret longed to tell her that she knew where the bit of blue faience had been found on the day when it was lost in the hut. She burned to say, "You little prying cat, you read my diary!" instead of which she said, quite calmly:

"The Divine Eye ought to have known better than to be the cause of Mohammed Ali's telling one of his finest lies."

"What do you mean?" Millicent asked. But even as she spoke, her face paled a little. "Your language has become quite cryptic—the result, I suppose, of your work in the tombs!"

"Probably," Margaret said. "Life in the Valley has taught me many things—but first and foremost, above all others, it has shown me the power and the danger of *baksheesh*. Good-night," she added quickly. "I've been keeping you."

Millicent looked at her with steely eyes. Meg's words were not too cryptic for her comprehension. "Good-night," she said. "When I hear from Mike, I'll let you know."

When Margaret reached her room, she flung off her self-restraint. Catching up a sofa-cushion, she flung it at an imaginary Millicent; two more went flying in the same direction.

"Oh, you beast, you hateful little beast!" she cried. "I believe you have won, after all! I wanted to find out if Michael was to blame, I wanted to make you confess that you trapped and followed him into the desert! And all I succeeded in doing was to hear from your own lips what all the hateful tongues in Egypt have been screaming and shouting in my ears for weeks past!" She sank down on the low sofa. "My pride spoilt everything. I wouldn't let you know that I cared, that I didn't know a word about anything, that I have never heard a line from Michael." Her mind stood at attention; a new thought held it. The holy man! Millicent had spoken of the holy man. Was he the "child of God" who was to lead Mike to the hidden treasure? She groaned. Oh, why had she not questioned her, why had she not controlled her own anger and her pride, and learnt from Millicent a thousand things she longed to know? She had not even asked her at what definite place in the desert she had left Michael! She had asked her absolutely nothing which would help her to find him. She had only gleaned from her the one fact, the fact which made it absolutely imperative for her to return at once to England. Her pride was so cruelly injured that she accepted that fact as absolute. Even if Michael was entirely innocent of any dishonour to herself, it was impossible not to feel wounded and hurt to the quick by

his silence. She had sworn to trust him, but was he not asking too much of human nature? Might he not have given a thought to the fact that Freddy and all the world would condemn him?

Of Michael's health Millicent had told her nothing. She had spoken in a manner which suggested that she had left him in the enjoyment of perfect health. Her excuses for him to Freddy had melted into thin air. How was she to tell Hadassah Ireton? Hadassah, whose complete trust had made her ashamed of Freddy.

. . . . . .

She had gone to her room early, but it was far into the night before she began to undress and get ready for bed. She was tired and unhappy and for once she allowed herself to accuse Michael. She began by saying that he had been thoughtless and neglectful, that he ought to have managed somehow to get a letter through to her as soon as Millicent appeared on the scene. She felt convinced that she would have contrived to let him hear under similar circumstances if . . . well, if she had wanted him to hear, if she had had a satisfactory explanation to offer. It was the horrible "if" which kept Margaret awake. That mustard-seed of suspicion grew and grew until its flowers of evil covered her whole world. Thought can make our heaven or our hell. Margaret's thoughts that night created no divine vision, no fair City of the Horizon.

If Millicent had come back to Cairo, because of business, surely Michael could have sent a letter by her servants, even if he had not cared to entrust it into her own hands. That was the thought which triumphed—it shed its darkness over the things of light.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE next morning Margaret rose early. During her long and sleepless night she had reviewed her position over and over again; there seemed to be no way out of it. She must and would keep her promise to Freddy.

It is impossible to give a lucid interpretation of her tortured feelings In her practical, reasoning mind her thoughts were black and suspicious; her heart was full of doubts, anger, wounded pride; while in the background, still shining like the dim light on the horizon at the approach of dawn, was her unconquerable belief in her lover's honour.

She felt compelled to act up to her practical judgment, to her promise that she would go home to England if she heard from either Michael's or Millicent's own lips that they had been together in the desert. But it was the horizon-light which helped her and made her able to bear the shock of Millicent's brutal announcement.

For one whole night she had faced the certain fact that Millicent had camped in the desert with Michael. Anyone who has considered the ceaseless workings of the human brain will understand what no pen could describe—the countless arguments for and against her lover's honour which came and went in an endless rotation in Margaret's mind.

She was glad when daylight flooded the room and she could get up and take the definite steps which would settle her doom. There is nothing so unendurable as lying in bed, a victim to miserable thoughts.

As soon as she was dressed she wrote a brief letter to Freddy. She felt like a criminal writing a warrant for her own arrest, but as the thing had to be done, it was best to get it over as soon as possible.

"DEAR CHUM,

"Last night I saw Millicent Mervill and what she told me leaves me no choice. I will keep my promise and go back to England. A boat goes next Tuesday; if I can book a passage I shall go by it. Until then I will stay with Hadassah Ireton. I like her most awfully.

"Please don't think that by keeping my promise to you I am condemning Mike or that I have given up hope that one day he will be able to explain everything satisfactorily. Don't worry about me, dear old thing. I'm all right and I will take every care of myself, so keep your mind easy on that point. I'm not nearly so wretched as I should be if I believed everything that this letter implies.

"Yours ever,

MEG.

"P.S.—Millicent pretended not to know anything about the information which the Government has received. She told me, with an air of beautiful innocence, that an uncle in Australia had left her a nice legacy. Funny isn't it? I think I managed to behave pretty well—the shades of our ancestors guarded me, I suppose."

When the letter was posted, and could not be retrieved, Meg went into the coffee-room and tried to soothe her soul with material comforts. An excellent cup of coffee made a good beginning. The letter settling her fate was in the post-office; she was going home to England in a few days. She was trying to swallow the hard facts with each mouthful which she drank.

What a contrast her leaving Egypt would be to her arrival in the country! How flattened out and disillusioned she would feel! What an ordinary, everyday ending to her vivid romance in the Valley! When she thought of the little hut, almost hidden in one of the many wrinkles of the hills, she smiled. Her senses glowed; she visualized the

arid scene, suddenly transformed into an Eden with Love's passion-flowers. No garden in paradise could suggest to a Moslem mind diviner voices or greater radiance. Cairo, with its confusion of sounds and its medley of human races, was empty and meaningless; it was wiped out. She was once more in the Valley, where life was vital and human.

After a little time of happy dreaming, the bitter fact came back to her, like a cold wind disturbing a summer's heat, that she had actually written to her brother promising him that she would go home. What would Hadassah think? What did her own conscience say?

Yet only one hour ago she had felt convinced that she was doing her duty, that her honour and womanly pride demanded that she should keep her promise. She had nerved herself against a thousand inner voices to obey her brother. She blushed for shame. In writing the letter she had practically admitted Michael's unfaithfulness as a lover. How could she have allowed herself to be so devastated by jealousy, have allowed her mind to be so concentrated on the unlovely side of the story? Even Hadassah Ireton had scorned it, while she, "the mistress of Mike's happiness," had doubted and despaired!

Poor Margaret! If she had been less human, her Valley of Eden had held no flowers. The desert had been a wilderness indeed.

. . . . .

The psychic and devotional side of her lover's nature engrossed her thoughts She recalled to her mind all that he had taught and explained to her about the views and religion of the tragic Pharaoh, the world's first conscientious objector.

Since she had heard of the scandal, she had scarcely thought of the occult and psychic side of the journey. Her attitude had been self-engrossed and materialistic.

She sighed. How difficult it was to drive self out of one's thoughts, for was there anything as interesting in the

whole of the wonderful world as one's self, one's miserably unworthy, puny self?

Hadassah had truly said, "We have two selves . . . what armed enemies they are!" Surely she, Margaret, had more than two selves? It seemed to her that she had a hundred, for every hour of the day and year.

Long ago, in her untroubled college days, she had been one woman, with one mind and one purpose—her intellectual work. Egypt had changed her. The great mother of the world-civilization had revealed to her some of the amazing secrets hidden in the human heart; from her immortal treasury of things good and evil she had bestowed upon her child the jewel of suffering, the pearl of passion. As a devout pupil Margaret had knelt at her knee.

In her very modern surroundings she felt quite another being from the Margaret who had seen the vision of Akhnaton in the Valley. She had allowed herself to forget that she had been instrumental in developing the psychic side of Michael's nature The thought of it now seemed absurd; it was probable that her surroundings and her work had been accountable for the visions. Her imagination had unconsciously pictured them.

And yet there was a sound argument against this common-sense, practical view of the thing, for she had visualized almost exactly the type and individuality of a character in history of whom she was totally ignorant. Even in the modern hotel, in her everyday surroundings, she could see with extraordinary clearness the rays of light which had surrounded that head. Nothing could ever obliterate the picture of the suffering Pharaoh from her memory.

She had left the breakfast-room, and as she waited for the lift to descend, she was almost afraid that it would bring Millicent down with it from the floor above. But it did not. There was a grain of disappointment in the elements which made up Margaret's feelings as she saw that it was empty. The Lampton combative instinct demanded a fight to the finish, and an open, broad-daylight attack.

## CHAPTER XVII

MARGARET kept her promise to Freddy. During the three days which she spent with the Iretons nothing transpired to make it possible for her to break it. No word, either by letter or by native word of mouth, had arrived from Michael.

Even to Nadassah's generous mind, Michael Amory's conduct seemed strange and inexplicable. His silence, in a manner, condemned him as casual, even if he was not guilty. She began to wonder if he had been carried off his feet by Millicent, if he had been weak and forgetful of Margaret for a little time. Millicent would certainly have done her best to deprive him of his higher instincts and ideals. If he had been faithless to Margaret, he was the type of man who would exaggerate the sin.

When she reviewed the situation calmly, she found that there was much to be said from Freddy Lampton's standpoint, and Margaret herself was growing more and more wounded by her lover's conduct—not so much by the fact that Millicent had been in the desert with him, for she knew the woman's persistence, but by the lack of effort which he had made to explain the situation to her Even if he had allowed himself to be carried away by Millicent's wiles, she would have forgiven him, for Margaret was very human, and she was no fool. Never had she imagined that her lover was a saint. What she felt it harder and harder every day to forgive was his silence, his want of courage, his lack of trust.

During those three days Margaret's beautiful world and life seemed to have crumbled into dust, just as she had seen the unearthed objects in Egyptian tombs crumble into atoms when the first breath of air from the desert reached them. Her contact with the world of to-day had melted her romance of the desert into thin air. It was a beautiful

vision which her strange life had created; it had flourished during her short stay in the Valley. It was not suited for the practical everyday world.

While she was with the Iretons, she tried to interest herself in Hadassah's work as much as possible. She contrived very bravely to put aside her wretchedness and at least appear interested and eager.

Her dignity and self-control added greatly to Michael Ireton's admiration for her. He, too, had been struck by her resemblance to Hadassah, so her beauty appealed to him very strongly.

Hadassah and her husband allowed her to go home to England without protest. Cairo was becoming very hot for an English girl, and they both agreed that it might do Michael Amory good to learn, when he did turn up, that his conduct had hurt Margaret's pride, that she was seriously wounded. As Millicent had spoken to Margaret of Michael as being in robust health, they had banished the idea that his silence was due to illness.

Outwardly Margaret behaved as though the whole episode of her love affair with Michael Amory was at an end. A woman's life is dog-eared by her live affairs; this was the first in Margaret's book of life. To the Iretons she was always very insistent that there had been no formal engagement between them, that Michael had not allowed her to think of herself as bound to him in any way—for only one reason he had not considered himself justified in asking her to become his wife or to wait for him. This to the Iretons meant nothing. He had made Margaret love him—that was the essential point—and his sensibilities must have told him that with such a girl love was no light thing. He must have realized that Margaret had given him the one perfect gift in her possession, an unselfish love.

Margaret was very loyal to her lover. It was easy to be that, for in her super-senses she was convinced of his great love for her, as a thing apart from anything else. She found it wise to discuss the mystery of his silence less and

less, for she knew that no one but God knows what is in our hearts, or what He has put there for our consolation, and that to all outward appearances things looked very black for Michael.

And so it came to pass that she sailed for England in the same boat as Freddy. He had hurried through his business and had managed to secure a passage, so as to look after her and be a companion to her on her disconsolate voyage.

On the journey to Marseilles, Margaret discovered qualities in Freddy's character which, even with all her love for him, she had never imagined. For her sake he contrived to hide his anger at Michael for his treatment of her, and thus express a sympathetic understanding of the temptations which had beset him. If Margaret had not suffered, he would have ignored the affair altogether, as a matter which did not concern him.

Freddy was very far-seeing. Margaret had kept her promise; she had shown that in spite of her romantic love for Michael her womanly pride had not been wanting. Any opposition or harsh denouncement of her lover would have brought out the obstinacy in her Lampton character. Persecution inflames the ardour of both love and religion. Margaret had confided to Freddy the true state of her feelings—her love was perhaps even greater than ever for the tardy Michael; jealousy had invigorated and reinforced it; but her pride and her love were wounded, and until Michael wrote to her or came to her, with a full and absolute apology and a good reason for his silence, she was determined not to play the part of a woman whose love would submit to any sort of casual treatment.

Freddy was well content. Time would settle things; Margaret was very young; she was scarcely aware yet of the possibilities that were in her own nature, of the things which can make life worth living, as apart from love and its passions. Love had buried her under an avalanche of its mystery and revelations.

Their journey home was as uneventful as it was surprising, for summer on the Mediterranean, where there is no spring, opened Margaret's eyes to a new phase of Nature's beauty. There was so much to see, and Freddy was such an excellent companion, that the time passed far more quickly and happily than Margaret could have believed possible. Did she know that it was the guarded light, which dispersed her brooding thoughts, thoughts which tried to spoil the beauty of the fairest scenes she had ever seen?

It was a voyage of solace and healing. As they sat together, the brother and sister, idly watching the spell of light resting on an archipelago of dreaming islands, or sailed out of the Bay of Naples on a morning of tender unreality, they little dreamed that in her womb the world was breeding a hellish massacre of God's highest creatures, a wholesale slaughter of His children; that that same summer's sun was to fall on fields of crimson, dyed with the blood of civilized nations, precious blood drawn from the veins of patriots and heroes by the lies and lust of a warmad king.

Ischia, lost in its ancient sleep, cradled in the beauty of the world's fairest waters, was to be waked with the bugles of war. From her mountain heights and her seagirt fields she was to send forth her sons, to fight until they became drunk with the smell of blood.

How little did either Margaret or Freddy dream that they were gazing for the last time together upon a land of dreams, upon a world of peace! As they sat and marvelled at a world which under a summer sun seemed as fair as heaven and as pure as an angel's dream, they little realized that Europe nursed and flattered a people more steeped in iniquity and eager for licentious cruelty than any nation recorded in the world's darkest story. The primitive barbarities of uncivilized races, and the war-atrocities of ancient Egypt and Assyria, which were familiar to Margaret, and against which Akhnaton had come to preach his mission

of peace, were as nothing compared to the acts which were to be committed by a nation which had preached the mission of Jesus for a thousand years, and had carried His doctrines into the farthest corners of the earth.

In the years to come that journey from Alexandria to Marseilles was to be one of the greatest consolations of Margaret's life.

In the days to come, when Margaret, knowing all things and enduring all things, looked back upon the journey, it comforted her to think of how much Freddy had enjoyed his well-earned rest and how eagerly he had looked forward to his holiday in Scotland.

. . . . . .

The war, which has set a date in England from which every event of importance counts and will be counted by her people for generations to come, had not been whispered or dreamed of by ordinary people. Like Ischia, England was still dreaming and trusting. Her ideals of honour forbade that she should doubt the honour of a sister-nation, bound to her by the closest ties of blood and sympathy.

When Freddy and Margaret landed in England they went their separate ways.

Margaret, at the outbreak of the war, at once offered her services as a V.A.D. Three months later she was working as a pantry-maid in a private hospital. Her work was very hard and deadly dull, but she had been promised that after working for a time as pantry-maid, she should be allowed to help in the wards. When Freddy left for the Front she was able to say good-bye during her "two hours off."

Fresh air and sunshine, after the dark basement-pantry in which she worked, seemed to her sufficient enjoyment and all the pleasure she wanted. She seldom did anything in these hours but sit on a bench in the garden-square near her hospital and rest her tired feet. For the first month they were so swollen that she could not get on her walking shoes. By four o'clock she was back in her pantry again, setting

out cups and saucers on little trays and laying the tea for the staff. Her work was lonely and unrecognized.

After she had washed up and put away the cups which had been used for afternoon tea and also the cups which had been used for the last meal of the day, which was served at seven o'clock in the wards, she went home to her quiet room, in a house on the other side of the square. It was an old house, which had known better days. The locality always carried Margaret's mind back to the gay world into whose society Becky Sharp so persistently pushed her way.

If Margaret was not happy, she was far too busy to be unhappy. She had, except for those two afternoon hours of rest, no time to think; and as thoughts make our heaven or our hell, Margaret lived in an intermediate state, for she had none. Her physical tiredness dominated all other sensations.

The war dominated her life; it drilled her, and drove her, and exacted the last fraction of her endurance and courage. It chased personal things away into the dim background of her life. When she thought of the Valley and her experiences there, it was as if she was visualizing, not her own past life, but some story which she had read and remembered with the sharp, clear memory, which never leaves us, of our childhood's days.

With Margaret, as with most people, the war opened up a completely new phase of mental as well as physical experiences. Nor could her thoughts ever be the same again. Margaret's phase resembled the state of a patient gradually recovering from a serious illness, an illness in which she has faced the true proportions of the things belonging to this life, and the triviality of human tragedies as they had existed before the war. Her life had begun all over again. The war was remaking it. After a serious illness or a shattered love-affair no woman can take up life at exactly the same standpoint as before.

Margaret found it impossible to imagine personal ambitions and personal amusements ever forming a part of her

life again. Happiness brought scorn with the very mention of it. The excitement and the daily-accumulating list of horrors which shocked the unsuspecting people of England during the first few months of the war, must be vividly in the reader's thoughts while he pictures Margaret in her life as a pantry-maid, a physically-weary pantry-maid, in a vast house in London which had been converted into a hospital. She was only one of the many girls in London in the various homes and hospitals who were drudging with aching limbs and loyal hearts from morning until night.

She preferred being pantry-maid to lift-maid, which was the only other post in the house which she had been offered. Taking visitors up and down in a lift all day long seemed to her more monotonous than washing up cups and saucers which the wounded drank out of, and scrubbing boards and washing out cupboards. Margaret was only doing her humble bit, a bit which required few brains and little education; a bit which necessitated a good deal of sturdy grit and devotion. Not a soul in the house knew nor cared anything about the life which she had led before the war, and her college record was of less account than the fact that she looked practical and strong. She had been given the post on the strength of her physical perfection rather than her proficiency as a V.A.D.

During the first three months she heard fairly often from Freddy, who was cheerfully enduring what thousands of young Englishmen endured during the early days of training.

If this is a war of second-lieutenants, Freddy was an excellent specimen of the men who have won renown. His physique laughed at hardship; his practical mind adored the order and method which is essentially a part of military efficiency. His work in Egypt, far as it seems removed from modern warfare, served a good purpose when trench-digging and planning became a part of his training.

October had come and still no news had reached him of

Michael, nor had Margaret had any word of her lover through the Iretons. Freddy was comforting himself with the assurance that the war had satisfactorily driven him out of Margaret's mind. She seldom mentioned his name in her letters, which were as brief and matter-of-fact as his own.

Sometimes in the busy London streets, and in crowded omnibuses, a vision of the Valley and the smiling Theban hills would rise before her eyes, but it would fade away and become as unreal as the Bible story of the world's creation.

Physical exhaustion made it possible for her to see these visions of the Valley, and the stars in the Southern heavens, with no throbbing in her veins or sense of Michael's lips pressed on her own. Physical labour leaves little expression for fine sentiment and imagination.

. . . . .

On the morning of the day when Margaret was to see Freddy off to the Front, she experienced a curious re-birth of personal existence; she was a partner in the world's agony. Since her work had begun she had lived like a machine; she was outside the great multitude of the elect; she had no one belonging to her in immediate danger. She had almost envied the personal anxiety of those who had their dearest at the Front.

Having no right to indulge in personal troubles which were entirely outside the subject of the war and the world's welfare, she had ceased to have any existence at all outside her dull duties as pantry-maid. But on the day of Freddy's departure she had a curious fluttering in her pulses, and a breathless excitement was in the background of all that she did. She found her hands trembling when she placed the cups in their saucers, or poured milk into the jugs.

Freddy's going was to link her to the great brotherhood. The consciousness of his danger would be like the weight of an unborn child under her heart. He was husband and

father and lover to her now; he seemed to be taking with him to France the last remnant of her girlhood.

At Charing Cross she found the khaki-clad figure. He was waiting for her below the clock. His men, and hundreds of others, were sitting about at rest, on the few seats which had been provided for soldiers going to the Front, or on the floor. Most of the men were accompanied by proud and tearful relatives or lovers. It was an affecting and typical scene—a peaceful country suddenly torn and driven by the throes and novelty of war.

Margaret had already witnessed such scenes several times. It always left her wondering how any order or method came out of such a bewildering mass of hastily-organized effort.

Freddy looked so handsome in his uniform that Margaret's heart felt bursting with tragic pride. Nothing was too good to die for England, but surely, surely Freddy was too beautiful to be blinded or disfigured by all the hellish contrivances which the brutalized enemy had proved themselves past masters in devising? Even in Egypt he had not been more sunburned, and never had his hair looked so adorably bright and youthful. Margaret could think of nothing but his beauty; it seemed to burst upon her suddenly and unexpectedly.

Freddy was conscious of her pride and admiration, but being true Lamptons, their greeting of one another was characteristically brief. It was the first time that Freddy had seen his sister in her V.A.D. uniform; his eyes took in all her points with one quick glance. She looked clean and slight and attractive, and conspicuously well-bred. Her abundant hair showed to advantage under her blue hat, while her teeth and her eyes seemed to Freddy remarkably beautiful. A V.A.D. uniform is not becoming, but if a girl is striking-looking, it accentuates her good points; frumps and mediocrities it extinguishes altogether.

"Come and have some tea," Freddy said. "I'm frightfully thirsty."

Margaret walked off with him proudly. He was her own brother, the Freddy she had worked with so long and so intimately in the little hut in Egypt, this alert, dignified soldier. The war was in its infancy; women were still thrilled by khaki, and extraordinarily proud of their men who wore it. Margaret felt so proud of Freddy that she was a little awed by him. In her heart she was kneeling at his feet, while in her subconscious mind there was a prayer, that his beauty and youth might not be spoilt, that his splendid manhood might be given back to England—it had other work to do.

Her tea, which Freddy had ordered in the large tea-room at Charing Cross Station, proved very difficult to swallow. Something filled her throat; it almost choked her, something which was a strange mixture of pride and tears and happiness. She had no desire to eat or drink; she was quite content to sit still. All she wanted to do was just to be near Freddy and look at him.

In this last half-hour, perhaps the last she would ever spend with him, there seemed to be nothing important enough to say. She certainly could not speak of the things which were in her heart. When people realize that they are together for perhaps the last time on earth, is there anything which is more eloquent than silence?

It was Freddy who came to the rescue; he talked to save Margaret's dignity. With his keen eye and appreciation of her character, he knew the fight she was making for self-control. His talk was of his men and of his life as an officer in the Army, and of the politics of the day. When he spoke of Ireland and of the satisfactory way in which she was behaving, their eyes met.

The question in Margaret's eyes was answered by a shake of his head and an immediate change of topic.

"Are you liking your work?" he said quickly.

"It's not thrilling, but it's doing my bit."

"Splendid!" he said, and Margaret knew that he understood.

A little silence followed, and then Freddy said, in rather a shamed voice, "Look here, Meg, we'd better be practical. I've left all my things in order—if I don't come back, you won't have any difficulty. Of course, all I've got will be yours. There are a few things I know you'll always look after, things I specially value."

Meg's throat was bursting and her lips began to quiver, but she choked back her emotions and regained her self-control. It came to her quite suddenly, just after speech had seemed hopeless.

"I understand—the Egyptian things. You can trust them to me."

"I know I can," he said. "And do take care of yourself. . . . We'd better be making a move, I suppose."

They both got up and shook their uniforms free of crumbs.

"I'm jolly thankful I managed to get the work in the Valley pretty well settled before this happened."

"It was a bit of luck," Margaret said. "Doesn't it seem a shame that all that wonderful work and all intellectual life must come to a standstill, everything must be put aside for the one job that counts—the killing of human beings? That is now the one and only thing that matters; the most effectual way of killing masses of men is the problem which scientific minds have set before them!"

Freddy looked keenly at her for a moment. Was Meg still imbued with Michael's anti-war views? England was at that moment tuned to such a pitch of war-enthusiasm that there was but one popular feeling and belief—that this war was sent to cleanse and purify the world, that it was a blessing in disguise, that but for this war England would have gone to the dogs. Anyone who dared to express an opinion contrary to this myth was condemned as pro-German or unpatriotic.

Meg felt her brother's eyes questioning her. "Never fear," she said. "If I don't think that the war was necessary as the chosen means of arresting England in her down-

ward course, I know that it has got to be fought to the finish, I know that the Allies have to prove that they will not submit to Prussian militarism dominating Europe. I never believed in the rottenness of England, and surely the spirits of our young men who are fighting ought to prove that it isn't? England decadent, indeed!"

"You're right," Freddy said. "England wasn't a bit rotten—or, at least, no rottener than she ever was, only the rottenness was all dragged into the limelight. Things are discussed in papers and from pulpits to-day which were never even spoken of between fathers and sons or husbands and wives in days gone by. If the war will stop all the absurd talk about England going to the dickens, it won't be fought for nothing. We've decried our country long enough."

They had only four minutes before they had to part. Margaret was beginning to feel numb and speechless. Were these four minutes to be the last she would ever spend with Freddy, and were they to go on talking as if he was only going back to Oxford after the long vacation?

Two more minutes passed and they had said nothing that mattered. Truly words were given to hide our thoughts!

As Margaret looked up at the clock, Freddy put his arms round her and held her closely to him. This was Meg's first tender embrace since her farewell with Michael. It was very nearly her undoing.

"Good-bye, old girl," was all that Freddy said; it was all he could say.

Meg clung to him and kissed him silently. Freddy felt her agony. It was greater than his own, for he had many responsibilities on his mind, and the excitement of actually going to take part in the "real thing." He kissed her with a tenderness which was almost a lover's.

Meg was still silent. She dared not attempt to speak; she knew that Freddy would hate tears. The next moment, after a closer hug, he put her decisively from him.

"Time's up, old girl! I must look after my men. We

are very much alone, we two. I wish I could have left you in someone's care."

"I'm so glad," Meg said, a little brokenly, "so glad it's just we two. I've never had to share you with anyone—you've always been my very own."

Margaret knew that Freddy had made a covert allusion to the fact that if Michael had not failed her, she would, in the event of his death, have had a lover to comfort her. She chose to ignore his meaning, to speak as if Michael had no place in her thoughts. Freddy was not to be worried by things which were past and over. The war had made her independent.

Freddy understood perfectly. They had reached the barrier; his men were filing through the open gateway to the platform.

"Good-bye," he said again, hurriedly. "Don't wait in this awful crowd—I shan't be able to speak to you any more." His eyes looked into hers tenderly. "God bless you, Meg! I hate leaving you all alone."

"Good-bye, Freddy."

Margaret's lips said the words bravely. In her heart they expressed their old and grander meaning.

She had turned her back on the khaki-clad men who were filing on to the departure-platform. Her silent prayer mingled with hundreds of others, travelling from proud, torn hearts, to the listening ear of the Master of that which is ordained.

## CHAPTER XVIII

THE news of Freddy's death reached Margaret only a fortnight later; it came to her from the War Office in the ordinary official way. He had not died, as he would have wished to have died, in action, in a great offensive against the enemy; he had been sniped, shot through the head when he raised its brightness for half a minute above the parapet of his trench. His courage and ability had never been put to the test; he had fallen like a first year's bird hit by a deadly shot.

His youth and brains and beauty were the offerings which he had laid on the altar of Liberty. Fame had been denied him.

As England's blackest days passed, and Margaret read in the papers the horrible accounts of the poisonous gas which was blinding and suffocating our men at the front, and when hospital nurses told her of the pitiful "gas" cases which they had seen, Freddy's painless death became almost a thing to be thankful for.

Pessimism was running its course. Germany's triumphs were magnified, the Allies' work belittled. She had come to think that it could only have been a case of time before he would either have been permanently injured or killed; the death-rate of officers was terrible. Freddy had died as he had lived, an almost perfect example of England's manhood—a striking proof that her decadence was an ugly scandal, whose birthplace was Berlin. It was one of Germany's many clever forms of propaganda, intended to undermine England's prestige in the eyes of neutrals when the "great day" came.

## CHAPTER XIX

A FEW weeks after Freddy's death a curious thing happened to Margaret, a thing which shook her nerves and disturbed the automatic calm into which she had drilled her thoughts.

She was still a hard-working pantry-maid, doing the same daily round of apparently unwarlike work. She was thankful that she had got it to do, and considered herself lucky, for the waiting lists of able and eager V.A.D.'s, whose names were down at hospitals and convalescent homes, ran into many figures, girls who were longing to be given any sort of occupation, however humble, which would place them amongst the women of England who were really in touch with the agony of the world. Margaret had still the promise before her of promotion, the hope that eventually she would reach the wards. Time would make its demands on the long lists of V.A.D.'s who were unemployed and eager for work. It would not be long before they would all be required. Someone else would step into her humble post when she was promoted. It was merely a case of patience and pluck; the voluntary hospitals were dependent on voluntary aid. She gave hers gladly.

It was a very lonely, self-contained Margaret who wandered about London during her "off-hours." Two hours gave her very little time for making expeditions or seeing the sights of London, which were all unknown to her, so she spent the greater part of her time in the secluded garden-square close to her lodgings. It always reminded her of a small public garden in Paris, in the old-fashioned quarter of the city, in which she had lived for a year with a French family while she was perfecting her French. The odd mixture of people who frequented it, and monopolized the seats in it for hours at a time, interested her. The work

which they brought with them was as diverse as it was peculiar. Not a few of the regular habitués made a home of it, even on wet days, only returning to their shelter to sleep. Youth and elegance seldom entered it, except, it might be, when a pair of lovers, of non-British birth, drifted into it, seeking refuge from the maddening crowd.

A London church, as black and white with smoke and the wearing winds of time as the marble churches of Lombardy, raised its belfry, of unnamable architecture, picturesquely above the square on one side, while a portion of its graveyard, which had been incorporated in the garden-square, and which seemed to Margaret in its shabby condition much older and more pathetically forlorn than the temple-tombs under the Thebian hills, attracted the aged and melancholy.

Margaret was the only lady who ever patronized the bench-seats in this secluded city oasis. Her V.A.D. uniform, and perhaps her air of unconscious dignity, defended her from any unpleasantness. She had never met with disrespect or lack of courtesy.

One of her chosen companions, an elderly, haggard woman, with a keen sense of humour and traces of lost beauty, who always brought a bundle of old rags and clothes to pick down, had made friends with her almost immediately. She proved a source of great amusement to Margaret. The woman's occupation had caused her much speculation.

She soon discovered, for the woman was not at all reticent, that she had been a low comedian and a dancer at Drury Lane Theatre, and like most comedians, high tragedy was her passion, and had been her ambition.

Margaret's off-hours flew on wings while she listened to the woman's accounts of her dramatic experiences. She had seen her days of prosperity and undoubtedly enjoyed much admiration. She was no grumbler and still retained an appetite for life. The sparrows and the fat pigeons which waited for the crumbs which fell from the pockets of the clothes she unpicked were her friends; her dreams of the past were her recreations.

When Margaret discovered that her desire for theatre-going was still unabated and unsatisfied, and that she considered that there was no pleasure on earth which wealth could bring her to be compared to the excitement of a "first night," as viewed from the gallery, she determined to give her a treat. She had not been to the theatre for many years; the necessary shilling for the gallery was never forthcoming; picking down old uniforms was not a lucrative occupation.

Margaret contrived to put the necessary shilling in her way by leaving it lying on the seat when she got up.

When she appeared in the garden-square the next day, the aged comedian told her about her "find," and asked her anxiously if she had lost a shilling. Margaret lied nobly; yet her lie was only half a lie, for she certainly had not lost it. She had vividly realized the finding of it.

Margaret never laid out a shilling to better account. It was returned to her fourfold as she listened to the glowing descriptions and the good criticisms of the first performance of one of the most popular war-plays which had been played in London.

And so the days passed and ran into each other, impersonal and unselfish days. The story of Margaret's individual life was marking time; but if her romance was arrested, her sympathies were expanding. It was impossible for her to be dull, and she did not allow herself to be sad. Freddy's example forbade self-pity or repining.

Of society in London she knew nothing and cared less. The war had put "society" out of fashion. If she could count amongst her friends many strange and questionable characters, they helped and cheered her as nothing else could have done. More than one poor home in which there was little food and much courage looked forward to the visits of the tall, dark girl, whom they called by no other name than "Our V.A.D."

It was her intimate acquaintance with the inner life of some of London's poor, and the example they unconsciously

set her by their cheerful acceptance of their pitiful circumstances and hideous surroundings, which made Margaret see how contemptible it would be to indulge in self-pity or repining. They expected so little, while she wanted so much—perfect happiness as well as worldly prosperity. They contrived to get enjoyment out of life even when it seemed to her that they would be better dead. She had a thousand things in life which had been denied to them. How could she expect to be given everything. There she was face to face with crowds of human beings who exaggerated their joys and rose above their afflictions. The unconquerable courage of the poor—that was what life in London was teaching Margaret.

. . . . .

It was one wet afternoon when she was seated in a Lyons' tea-shop, in a crowded part of a West End shopping district, waiting for a cup of coffee to be brought to her, that the strange incident happened. To make use of her time, she had taken out a small writing-tablet which she carried in a bag with her knitting, and was beginning to write a letter to her Aunt Anna. She had written the first words, "Dear Aunt Anna," and she paused before writing further. Her pencil was close to her tablet; her mind was thinking of what she was going to say. Suddenly her hand began writing very fast, automatically, something after the manner in which an actor writes on the stage. Margaret let it write swiftly and uninterruptedly, without either considering it strange that it should be doing so, or wondering, at the time, what she was writing. Her thoughts had, in a curious way, become subservient to her actions. Afterwards, when she tried to remember what she had felt, she could recollect no impression.

When the quick movement of her hand stopped and the automatic writing ceased, her powers of thought seemed suddenly to reassert themselves. Probably what she had been writing was mere unintelligible scribble.

Margaret had never heard of the writing of the "unseen

hand." She was more nervous than she was aware of; there was a heavy beating at her heart, a wonder in her mind. She looked with apprehension at the sheet of paper on the tablet. Her hand had certainly written something, but the writing was not her own. It was untidy and broken. She tried to read it, but the first words made her so nervous that she could not go any further. They brought the colour flying to her face, but it quickly left it; she became wide-eyed; her hands trembled. It was horrible to think that some outside influence had taken possession of her actions. She fought for self-control, and managed to read the message.

"The rays of Aton, which encompass all lands, will protect him, the enemy will fear him because of them. The living Aton, beside Whom there is no other, this hath He ordained. The Light of Aton will scatter the enemy and turn his hand from victory. When the chicken crieth in the egg-shell, He giveth it life, delighting that it should chirp with all its might. The same Aton, Who liveth for ever, Who slumbers not, neither does He sleep, knows the wishes of your heart. The Lord of Peace will not tolerate the victory of those who delight in strife. His rays, bright, great, gleaming, high above all earth. . . ."

There the writing became almost indecipherable; many words were quite meaningless; only the end of the last line was distinct:

"To the mistress of his happiness, Aton the Loving Father, giveth counsel."

When Margaret had finished reading the amazing thing that her hand had written, she was faint and frightened. What had come over her? How could she account for the mysterious thing which had happened?

The state of her nerves prevented her thinking connectedly or sensibly. The meaning of the message scarcely formed any part of her bewilderment; it was the automatic writing itself which disturbed her. It made her very unhappy. She had never heard of anything like it happening

to anyone else. She wished that she had only dreamed it; but there the words were, lying on the tablet before her. If she was real, they were real.

It was so long since she had read anything about Akhnaton's Aton-worship that she could not have composed the sentences in exactly the manner of the Pharaoh's writing if she had set herself down in a retired place and tried very hard to remember his style and his language. Here, in this modern and vulgar tea-room, filled with men and youths in khaki and shop-girls in cheap and showy finery, she had suddenly and unconsciously written a thing which had absolutely nothing to do with her thoughts or surroundings.

The girl who brought her coffee and was standing waiting to make out her bill, looked at her sympathetically and asked her if she felt ill.

At the sound of her voice, Margaret dragged her thoughts back to the fact that she had been waiting for a cup of coffee.

"No," she said, jerkily "I am not ill, only a little tired, thank you."

"You're working hard, I suppose? One coffee, threepence," she jotted down. "Are you in a hospital? I wish I was nursing, instead of doing this."

Margaret looked at her blankly for a moment. She wished that she would not talk to her; she felt afraid of her own answers.

"No, I'm not nursing—I'm a pantry-maid in a private convalescent hospital."

"Well, I never!" the girl said; she was not ignorant of Margaret's good breeding. "Do you like the work?"

"It's very like your work, I suppose. I never stop to think about whether I like it or not. Someone has to do it, and I've been given it—every little helps."

"Isn't that splendid?" the girl said. "And I don't suppose you ever worked before?"

"Not in that way," Margaret said. She smiled a queer sort of smile, as her thoughts flew back to her work in the

hut, the cleaning and sorting of delicate fragments and amulets which had been made and treasured by a people of whom the girl had probably never even heard, the mascots and art-treasures of a forgotten civilization, which had lasted for thousands of years.

Margaret paid for her coffee, and looked at the clock. She had only a few minutes in which to drink it. She poured in all the cream which she had ordered to cool it, but still it was too hot to drink. While she waited she wondered whether her hand would write anything else if she left it lying on her writing pad. Nervously she took up her pencil and while she tried to sip her coffee, she left her right hand lying on the pad just as it had been before.

Nothing happened. Her hand never moved; she was extremely conscious of her own feelings and expectations.

She looked at the writing on the tablet once more. Yes, it was totally and absolutely unlike her own. She tore off the sheet on which it was written and folded it up and put it safely in her note-case. If she was to drink her coffee, there was no more time for thought.

Hurriedly she left the crowded tea-rooms and started off in the direction of her hospital.

It was well for her that she had to hurry, and that her thoughts for the next few hours had to be given to the carrying-out of everyday things. With practised mind-control she put the incident of the "unseen hand" away from her as far as she could. When it came creeping back again, like leaking water, into the foreground of her thoughts, she fought it splendidly.

Freddy had so extremely disliked her dabbling, as he called it, in occult matters, that for his sake, for his memory, she must not allow herself to be mastered by it. She had scarcely ever allowed herself to think even about her vision in the Valley for this very reason, and had refused to be drawn into the wave of fortune-telling by palmistry and by crystal-gazing and psychic sciences which the war had given birth to in London. The nurses and the staff

generally at the hospital spent a great deal of time and money on palmists.

Margaret could honestly say to herself that no one had sought those strange experiences less than she had, no one had been less interested in Spiritualism and black magic, as it used to be called, than she had been—and, indeed, still was. Michael had called her his practical mystic, yet she had never felt herself to be one.

For Freddy's sake she would not encourage this new phase of the super-mind which had suddenly come to her. He had considered Spiritualism a dangerous and undesirable study. With only his memory to cling to, she would do nothing which would cause him any trouble. Here again was the Lampton ancestor-worship developing to its fullest.

## CHAPTER XX

When Margaret got back to her hospital, she found no time for psychic reflections, for news had come that a fresh consignment of patients was to arrive at the hospital the next morning, and as the number was considerably more than they had expected, or the wards had beds for, it meant that the staff, from the humblest to the highest in command, had plenty of extra work to do.

She did a hundred and one odd jobs which kept her busy until nine o'clock A V.A.D. whose duty it was to run the lift was ill; she had had to go home, so Margaret took her place until a girl-scout appeared, who was a sister of one of the staff-nurses. The proud girl-scout became lift-boy in her after-school-hours and kept the post until the V.A.D. was well enough to resume her work. During the day the V.A.D.'s filled the post between them, taking it in turn.

It was not until all her work was done, and Margaret was alone in her bedroom, with its air of ghostly fashion, that she found it increasingly difficult to drive the incident of

the automatic writing from her mind. She did not wish to think of it because of her promise to Freddy. While she had been busy it had never entered her head. Certainly Satan finds some mischief for idle thoughts as well as for idle hands to do. But was it Satan who had sent these thoughts? Was she dabbling in black or in white magic?

She wondered whether, if she looked at the writing once more, and thought over every incident of the strange occurrence which had happened to her, very clearly and thoroughly, it would help her to drive it from her mind, in the same way as saying some haunting lines of a poem over and over again will often drown their insistence in our ears. Certainly she must make an effort to free herself from the obsession of the incident. It was unnerving her.

She took the sheet of paper out of her note-case and read the writing on it aloud, very distinctly and slowly. She said the words thoughtfully, so as to get their precise value. As she read them, she tried her utmost to subdue the increasing nervousness which they produced, a nervousness which she certainly had not in any way experienced when her hand had hurriedly written down the words.

As she read them aloud, she realized, with a sudden and astounding clearness their true meaning, which had either escaped her intelligence, or she had been too astonished and interested in her own action to appreciate before. Her first feeling had been one of amazement and interest; now she felt quite convinced that the message had been sent to her to tell her that Michael was at the Front, that she was not to trouble or be afraid, for his safety was in divine hands.

How much or how little her super-senses had understood this fact she could not be certain. Her over-self was an independent factor. Her natural consciousness had certainly not appreciated the news. She had never said the fact to herself, or derived any comfort from it, or questioned it. She had been too overwhelmed by the practical evidence that she was once more in touch with her vision

to grasp the real purpose of the message. Its value had been lost upon her, even though it had told her that Michael was fighting, that he was in the war. But was he? That was the question which her natural mind forced upon her. She must take it on faith or reject the whole thing as a fabrication of her own brain.

The writing had told her that the Light of Aton would guard him, that the rays of Aton, which were God's symbol on earth, would encompass him and confound his enemies.

To the reasoning, practical Margaret it seemed incredible nonsense, and yet Egypt had taught her that nothing is incredible. She had thought of many solutions of the problem of Michael's disappearance, many answers to her riddle of the sands, but she had, to her conscious knowledge, never once imagined that he would be taking part in this most horrible of all wars. Knowing his views upon the subject of war, the possibility had never entered her mind that he might have volunteered to fight in it. He had said over and over again that Germany's desire for war was a myth, a mere mania which obsessed a certain class of mind; that if such a thing happened it would be the death-blow to the spread of Christianity, and rightly so, for a religion which had done no more for the most scientifically-advanced race in the world was not likely to be adopted by non-Christian races.

And yet the hand had written words which could have no other meaning. She had no friends or relations at the front. Her first cousins were all too young, and their fathers too old, to fight. Freddy had represented her personal and intimate interest in the army at the Front.

She read the words over and over again, until she knew them by heart, until the strange handwriting which her own pencil had formed had become familiar to her. She knew that she could never have written the words except by some outside power. But what was that power? Had anyone else ever experienced it? Was it known to Spiritualists?

As she asked herself the question, a picture formed itself

in her mind of Daniel interpreting "the writing on the wall" to the guests at the feast of Belshazzar. She saw the hand write the three words: *Numbered, weighed, divided.* She saw the wonder of the King and the curiosity of his friends. God only, who sent the omen, explained it, and all which Daniel under His direction uttered, explaining it, was fulfilled.

Egypt had reconstructed in Margaret's mind the proper proportion of time as applied to the history and evolution of the world's civilization. The deeds and the victories of Cyrus, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, were not mythical deeds because they belonged to a mythical and lost age. In Egypt they had seemed to her legends of a comparatively late date. Darius, the Mede, to whom Biblical authority awards the succession of the kingdom of the vanquished and slain Belshazzar, was removed by almost a thousand years from the world which had known the gentle King, the youthful Pharaoh, who loved not war, and whose God was the Prince of Peace.

As compared to Michael's beloved Akhnaton, Belshazzar was a mere modern. Almost one thousand years before the impious King had reigned over Babylon, Akhnaton had told the Egyptian people of the unspeakable goodness and loving-kindness of God, he had preached a religion which was to abolish all wars, which was to unite all nations under the banner of universal brotherhood.

The Biblical handwriting on the wall had come into her thoughts for a good purpose. The vision of it had been sent to prove to her that such things had happened in the world before, and that there was no reason to believe that they had not often happened since. God works in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.

Her fight against her desire to believe had been solely on Freddy's account. He had so intensely disliked her interest in occultism that for his sake she had struggled faithfully to subdue it. Now she knew that she could no longer ignore the influence which had entered into her life in this

strange manner, not understood by her material self. She possessed powers and qualities which with all her heart she wished that she did not possess. She dreaded this last evidence of the mysterious power which had made her very actions subservient to its will.

Yet even as she said the words she was ashamed. If the message had any connection with the figure in her vision, how could she hate it? Instantly the tragic eyes, glowing with the light of divine love, were before her; their reproach and pity made her blush, for in denying her belief in things spiritual, she was surely denying the power of the Holy Spirit in just the same way as Peter had denied and mocked at Jesus for His assumption of divinity.

Believing, with the intuition of her higher self, with her divine mind, whose reasoning powers were in heaven, like the desert child of God—for so the everyday world would say of her if they had known—in the spiritual source of the amazing message, she ceased to question the why or the wherefore of it. She could not treat it as the mere creation of her own overwrought imagination, and yet she would be true to Freddy in the sense that she would do absolutely nothing to get into closer touch with the world behind the veil. She would make no effort to develop her powers.

On that point her conscience was absolutely clear. She had been loyal and true to Freddy; she had left all occultism and mysticism severely alone. And surely never in the world had her mind been farther separated from things Egyptian or occult than on this afternoon, when she had suddenly felt her hand begin to write of its own free will? Of all people in the world, her Aunt Anna was the last who would call up any suggestion of her vision in the Valley, and Freddy would agree that a Lyons' tea-room was amazingly unsuited for such an experience.

She puzzled her brain to find out any reason why this message should have been sent to her at this particular time, why Michael had been thrust so vividly into her life

again. Her pride had driven him from her mind until he had at last actually lost his place in her daily thoughts. It would be impossible now not to think of him; she was thinking of him with a beautiful rebirth of her first romantic love.

. . . . . .

Was he, with all his horror of bloodshed and war, in the trenches while she was snug and sleeping in her bed at night? Were some mangled and unrecognizable fragments of his body lying on the battle-fields of Flanders? Or, sadder than all, had he, like Freddy, never been in action? Had his life also been a useless sacrifice?

As she asked herself the question, the bright rays of Aton shone round a figure in khaki; she saw Michael clearly and beautifully. He was illuminated by a bright and shining light. Margaret remained motionless and spellbound. Her visualizing was more than a mere mental reproduction of an imaginary scene. The bright light which surrounded Michael revealed to her how instantly his enemies would quail before him, how terrified and amazed they would be!

In an ecstasy of wonder and surprise Margaret called to him. Her voice broke the spell; her eyes saw nothing, nothing but the shadows and the half-lights shed by her inadequate gas-jet in the large room.

She fell on her knees beside her bed. She must get closer to God, she must feel Him, for there was no human being in whom she could confide. She was terribly alone; her body hungered for arms of sympathy, her mind for understanding ears. The lonely and love-starved will know how she craved to be gathered up and comforted; how she longed to throw off her self-reliance, to let it be lost in a strength which would make her feel like a little child in a giant's arms. As only God knows what is in our hearts, only God understood her unspoken prayer. He was not shocked by its pitiful humanity. That night He permitted the tired V.A.D. to sleep in the strength of His everlasting arms.

## CHAPTER XXI

Some few days later a letter arrived for Margaret from Hadassah Ireton. It contained interesting and surprising news. Michael Ireton had been thrown in close contact with one of the excavators who had formed the camp in the hills behind Tel-el-Amarna—they were now both employed in the same Governmnet office in Assiut.

From the excavator Michael Ireton had learned that the secret police had traced the movements of the native who had given the Government the information about the chambers in the hills, and had discovered him. But, as bad luck would have it, he was ill with smallpox and incapable of giving any information. The man had died without recovering consciousness. The excavators had become more and more convinced that he had stolen the treasure, and that it was now resting in its second hiding-place, awaiting, it was to be hoped, its final discovery.

If the man had recovered, his information could no doubt have been bought. To an Eastern a guinea in the hand is worth twenty in the bank.

The reason, Hadassah explained, for the excavators' belief that there had been a hidden treasure, of jewels if not of gold, was the fact that half a mile or more beyond the site of the excavation three uncut jewels of considerable value had been found in the open desert. They had been covered and hidden from sight by the drifting sand, and there they would have lain perhaps for ever but for the stumbling of a tired donkey, which was carrying a native and a huge load of forage to a subterranean village, not very far from the site of the excavation. The disturbing of the sand had exposed the jewels, which caught the sunlight and the sharp eyes of the desert traveller.

He was an old man, exceedingly honest, uncontaminated

with the ways of city dwellers, so he took the jewels to the *Omdeh's* house and asked him if he thought that they were valuable, and if they were, what he should do with them.

The *Omdeh* (it was the same *Omdeh* who had so little credited the story of the hidden treasure when he had spoken of it to Michael) was as surprised as he was suspicious. His interest was aroused. Could these fine jewels have been dropped by the thief who had burgled the tomb? These were his thoughts, although Hadassah did not know it.

He at once carried them off to the Government camp in the hills. The excavators pronounced them to be ancient stones of great value.

The other reason for their belief that the treasure had been stolen was the fact that the inner chamber, in which they had found absolutely nothing, had obviously been built with a view to holding objects of great value. It had all the qualities of a royal treasury. The inscription on the wall spoke of it as "the treasure-house of Aton." That no ancient plunderer had entered this chamber, which the heretic King had cut out of the rock under the hills behind the city, was obvious. There had been practically no excavating to be done, in the sense in which Margaret thought of excavating, because the chambers were all in a state of perfect preservation; none of them were blocked up with rubbish. Once the entrance had been opened up—and this had been done by the native who had discovered the site—they met with little difficulty.

The entrance had been so skilfully hidden, that the excavators wondered how it had happened that the ignorant native who gave the information had discovered it (this Hadassah considered extremely interesting and convincing from Michael's point of view) and what had put him on the track of the hidden treasure.

These questions, Hadassah said, her husband had refrained from answering. He considered that the treasure, in its second hiding-place, belonged to Michael, that it

must remain there until he found it. Michael Ireton had listened to all that the excavator had to tell and had held his tongue on the subject of Mr. Amory's expedition; the psychical part of it would probably have called forth much derision and scoffing.

Hadassah ended her letter by congratulating Margaret on the fact that the treasure, whether it was great or small, did exist, that it was an actual fact. The finding of the jewels proved that Michael's theories and occult beliefs were justified. "And after the war you will be able to go with him on his second pilgrimage, for certainly the spirit of Akhnaton has saved the treasure for him. What the world calls chance has preserved the King's legacy from profane hands."

* * * * *

The letter was written from the Fayyum, where Hadassah was staying with her boy. Her constant visits to this beautiful oasis had wrought great changes in the house in which her cousin Girgis had spent the greater part of his life. Her aunt and cousin had, with native quickness, learned to speak English quite fluently, and Hadassah had, by her tact and sympathy, helped to develop their lives and intellects. The household was scarcely recognizable as the one in which, only a few years ago, she and Nancy had endured a terrible half-hour at afternoon-tea.

Hadassah often wished that Girgis could have seen the development and change which the widening influence of Western ideas had brought about in his old semi-native, semi-European home.

In all things relating to the war it was an ardently pro-English household, which, ever since its outbreak, had become a veritable institution for Coptic war-workers Veiled figures hurried to it, carrying their knitting, proud and pleased to be imitating the efforts of the European ladies in Egypt, and knit they did from morning until night, with the patience and endurance of the uncomplaining East.

Hadassah's letter greatly disturbed Margaret. If it had

only come before Freddy was killed, how she would have gloried in it, how delightful it would have been to tell him that even a scientific body of excavators had come to the conclusion that a treasure had been laid up by the religious fanatic—for that was Freddy's summing-up of Akhnaton —that the seer's vision had again proved true!

But now she had no one to rejoice with. Freddy had been taken from her, and Michael was lost, and there was not a creature in all her world who would care one brass farthing about the strange materializing of Michael's spiritualistic theories. All that she cared most about she had to subdue and crush back. Probably Freddy, in his new life, was understanding and sympathizing, for she knew now with a nervous certainty that the veil is very thin.

Hadassah had said in her letter, when referring to the death of the native, "This sounds as if Millicent's servants had played her false. The police report that she never reached the hills, so whether her dragoman deliberately took her off the track, and allowed one of her servants to go to the hills and secure the treasure, remains a mystery which may never be solved. But one thing is pretty clear—that her cavalcade was never seen in that part of the desert, for, as you know, the drifting sand in Egypt carries information; it conceals and reveals many things undreamed of in our Western philosophy."

As Margaret read these lines she cursed her own stupidity with a bitter curse. If she had used a little more tact and shown less jealous rage, she could have learnt from Millicent all which now so baffled them. She could easily have discovered if she had ever reached the hills.

Margaret was rereading the letter in her off-hours. Her first reading of it had been very hurried, for it had arrived by the first post, and she had only found time to devour it with eager eyes, eyes which searched its pages for one precious item of news. She was scarcely conscious of her desire for news of Michael's whereabouts. There was always the hope, unexpressed even to herself, that he had written

to the Iretons. If he really was at the Front, surely he would have told them? But the letter contained no such information.

Her disappointment was, however, drowned in surprise and pride. With one fell swoop the letter had obliterated the passion and obsession of war which had held her in its clutches. It made her forget, for a little time, at least, that such a country as Germany existed. Her mind was again vivified with visions of the desert and the various scenes which Hadassah's letter suggested. Flashing before her eyes was the open desert, the unbroken light, and the stumbling donkey, heavily-laden and meekly submissive, with the gleaming gems, betrayed by the rays of Aton. She could visualize the astonished native fingering them and holding them up to the light; the sunlight, Akhnaton's symbol of divinity, was to bear testimony to the fact that the bright objects which had caught the Arab's eyes were beautiful and rich-hued gems, that they were indeed a portion of the treasure which he had hidden from the avarice of the priests of Amon, who set up graven images and worshipped false gods.

For the first time since she had been doing the work of a pantry-maid, Margaret set out the tea-trays and washed up the cups in an automatic, aloof manner. Her material body was busy in the hospital-pantry, while spiritually she was far away. Visions rose and faded before her eyes in rapid succession, but the one which she saw oftenest was the look of surprise and smiling incredulity on Freddy's face. The cry in her heart was for his sympathy, for his knowing, for his congratulations on the wonderful piece of news. Why could he not have been allowed to know it while he was still alive on this earth and able to talk to her? She wanted to be personally and materially close to him while he read the letter.

She longed for that more ardently and whole-heartedly than anything else; she hungered for it even more fiercely than the coming back of Michael, whose return into her

life she was convinced would eventually happen. Whether it would be for her happiness or otherwise she was ignorant.

When she thought of his coming and of her first meeting with him, her pride rose up in arms, her mind was devastated with embarrassment. The meeting would open up old wounds, which she had imagined were healed. There she had been mistaken; they were like the wounds of a patient which appear to be healed while he lies at rest in the hospital, but which break out again when he resumes his normal life. The war had drugged Margaret's senses.

She had curiously little fear for Michael as a soldier, for whenever she thought of him as one, as fighting at the Front, she saw the bright light surrounding him, and disarming his amazed opponents.

During the short time which Freddy was at the Front, how different her thoughts had been! His beauty and ability seemed to say to her, as she watched him on that memorable afternoon at the station, "Whom the gods love die young." He seemed to typify to her England's brave and beautiful young whom the war chose for its victims. The wages of the war were England's youth and devotion. She knew that much as Freddy loved his work and enjoyed his life, he would be the last to grudge his death. It was she herself who so ardently wished that he had died in action; that his brains and ability had been given a chance; that he could have done as he would have wished to do, taken a life for a life; that he could avenge in honest warfare the hideous death of his comrades.

The letter from Hadassah made Margaret realize the awful fact that Freddy was dead as nothing else had done, that his death meant that she could never, never again consult him, or speak to him, or hope to hear from him. It was not only a case of patience and the distance of half the world between them; it was a case of never, never again on this earth. She had scarcely known the meaning of death until this starvation for his sympathy revealed itself to her. The awful difference between mere distance and death had

escaped her. Hundreds of men were dying, but death was talked of unconvincingly, superficially.

Now, by some strange means, she suddenly saw the years of doing without Freddy stretching out before her. The Valley where his work lay would never see him again. His brains and extraordinary energy were lost to the world; his archæological work would be taken over by others.

The pent-up tears which Margaret had not shed when she received the news of his death, or during all the busy days which followed it, mingled themselves with the unrestrained weeping which Nature sent to save her overwrought system. She cried uninterruptedly, until the urgency of tears subsided. She dried her eyes and braced herself up. Her weeping had stopped suddenly; it had exhausted itself.

It seemed to her that she could almost hear a voice repeating to her a sentence out of Hadassah's letter It was strikingly like Hadassah's own voice. "Try to remember that your wonderful brother is still doing his bit. He is working hard, wherever he is—be sure of this, for it is what he would wish."

. . . . . .

Margaret carried this thought in her mind as she returned to her pantry; Hadassah was right. Freddy was working; wherever he was, he was busy, for he could not be happy if he was not working and helping on the cause of the Allies. Freddy had been one of the few enthusiasts in the early days of the war who had never pretended, even to himself, that England's primary object in declaring war against Germany was to avenge the devastation of Belgium. He knew that England had to enter it to save herself and France from a similar devastation.

When she was busy at work again, Margaret said to herself, "Of all the strange things which have happened during the last six months, perhaps the strangest of all is the fact that in all the wide world, the only human being to whom I should dream of applying for help or for sympathy

in the things that matter is Hadassah Ireton, Hadassah the Syrian, whose marriage with an Englishman of good family would have so shocked and horrified me not so very long ago!"

A smile of amusement changed the expression of her face. She was thinking of Hadassah as she really was, and of the outcast Hadassah as she would have pictured her. The smile lost itself in the shame with which the memory of her ignorance and prejudice filled her. How well Hadassah and her husband could afford to forget the narrow-mindedness and the conceit of it all!

## CHAPTER XXII

And now to return to Michael. During the weary weeks of anxiety and suffering which Margaret spent in Egypt before she sailed for England, Michael lay hovering between life and death in the *Omdeh's* house near the subterranean village in the Libyan Desert.

Abdul had taken him there when he gathered him up in his strong arms on the eventful evening when he left the excavation-tent in the hills. A violent attack of fever, made more serious and difficult to throw off by the overwrought condition of his nerves, kept Michael a helpless exile in the hands of the hospitable but somewhat ignorant *Omdeh* and the devoted Abdul.

When the fever was at its height, Michael was very often delirious; in his ramblings he let the discreet Abdul see deep down into the secret hiding-places of his heart. Sometimes he spoke in English, and sometimes in Arabic. Abdul could understand a great deal more English than he could speak, and as Michael often repeated the same thing in Arabic—when he thought he was addressing Abdul—he soon found the key to much which, without the Arabic translation and constant reiteration, might have escaped

his understanding. Arabs learn a language with extraordinary rapidity; it is no unusual thing to meet a dragoman who can understand three or four languages, and speak a fair smattering of each; the same man is probably unable to read or write in any one of the four. From the deep waters of affliction came strange and terrible revelations, of desires and temptations which the conscious man had not allowed himself to recognize. In his helplessness they leapt forth and proclaimed themselves unmistakably. He innocently betrayed the nature of the woman who had earned Abdul's hatred.

At other times he called upon Margaret and implored her forgiveness, denouncing the woman who had followed him. He cursed her in horrible words. Even Abdul was surprised at their impiety. Once, when Abdul laid his fine fingers on his burning forehead, Michael took his hand eagerly and tried to kiss it. The next instant he rejected it and with the strength of delirium threw it from him and tried to get out of bed.

"That's not Margaret's hand?" he said angrily. "And I want no other woman than Margaret. I have told you that before—I belong to Margaret, I am Margaret's body and soul. I told you that the first time we ate our meal together, even before your white tent went up."

When Abdul managed to subdue his master's fears, he laughed wildly and idiotically. "Of course it is only you, Abdul. I had forgotten. I seem to forget everything . . . I thought that . . ." here his words became incoherent. "I was so tired, Abdul, and you were sitting up in the sky above the horizon . . . so very tired."

Abdul fanned his babbling master and offered him a cooling drink. Michael swallowed it eagerly; his bright eyes gazed pitifully into Abdul's after the last drain was swallowed

"Don't let the other woman come near me," he pleaded. "She is wearing all Akhnaton's precious stones—they are hung round her neck, her breasts are covered with them.

But her skin is so white and tender, the sun is burning it—I must lend her my coat." He laughed horribly. "Mean little beast, Abdul, how frightened she was! The saint gave me the amethyst—it's for Margaret."

Abdul listened to these strange outpourings with the philosophy and trust of a devout Moslem. If Allah willed it, He would let his master recover. He had put the Effendi in his care, and no trouble was anything but a pleasure to him if it brought some sense of ease and comfort to the delirious Michael.

The *Omdeh* was the very soul of hospitality. He observed the teachings of the Koran in the spirit as well as in the letter. He spoke no English, so he was ignorant of all that Michael's delirious words conveyed to Abdul. On his master's concerns, Abdul was a well of secrecy.

By night and by day he heard him go over the same ground again and again. His life in Egypt for the last few months was expressed in broken sentences and vivid declarations, uttered sometimes with astonishing gravity and lucidity. At times Abdul was deceived into thinking that he was conscious, that his reasoning powers had returned, that he was quite sensible. But he was soon undeceived by a sudden breaking-off in the continuity of the words, or a return to confused, half-meaningless sentences. It was only by the constant repetition that Abdul learned the whole truth. A bit out of one raving fitted into another, and things hard to explain were made clear.

Once he said very gravely, "Hadassah Ireton will help Margaret, the beautiful Hadassah. She is more beautiful than Margaret, Abdul, much more beautiful, but Margaret is the mistress of my happiness."

Abdul answered by saying, "*Aiwah*, Effendi, she is your guarded lady, she will be the mother of your sons."

"She who sends me to rest with a sweet voice, and with her beautiful hands bearing two sistrums."

Abdul was ignorant of the fact that his master was quoting the words of Akhnaton, as written in the tomb of

Ay in reference to his queen. He thought they were his master's own words, and so thinking, his heart was cheered, for Michael's voice was gentle and reasonable. But the hope was suddenly wiped out.

"Are the camels ready, Abdul? We must get away, get away from the woman It's the only way. And you thought I cared, you came in sorrow to tell me that the little beast had slipped away, just while Margaret was standing among the daffodils. I heard her calling, calling in the breeze. I was in England with Margaret."

Abdul saw that he had been mistaken. His master had never been sensible; he was declaiming again, in his high-pitched, unnatural voice.

"I was a Christian—they wouldn't allow me to see the holy man buried. But he gave me the jewel, the gem precious beyond all rubies. Abdul covered his poor body with quicklime; he said it would prevent infection. Freddy won't believe it, Margaret, so we won't tell him—he would only laugh. 'A child of God shall lead you'—that is what the old African said. But I never told Freddy; he thinks I stand on my head . . . Abdul! Abdul!" Michael's cry was ringing forlorn. "Do you see the Government flag? It's all up, Abdul, it's all moonshine! We're too late, too late. Freddy will say that Millicent detained me! Is it the fluttering flag of the saint? It was Millicent who saw it in the sunlight."

In despair Abdul recited a *sura* from the Koran. "The God Who gives a good reward for the good deeds of His creatures, and does not waste anyone's labour."

Michael took up the last words of Abdul's prayer, in the way in which a delirious mind will often carry on a sentence which drifts to the brain.

"Nothing is ever wasted, Freddy—I've told you that over and over again. You say I waste my time. You won't say so, when you see the jewels. The saint kept it in his ear, Abdul—wasn't that clever for a child of God! Look, look, Abdul!" Michael stared into the distance; his eyes

became transfixed; he was excited, strong physically. "Millicent's small breasts are so white, so white and fair. Her two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a roe, that feed among the lilies. They are covered with jewels, they catch the sunlight. How beautiful she is! Do you see her, Abdul? She is walking in the air in front of me, all the way, Mohammed Ali's 'golden lady.'"

Abdul applied a wet towel to his master's burning temples. He sank back on his pillow exhausted; his voice became low and feeble.

"The little white tent, it is always calling, calling, its open door is always inviting me. Why does it say, all day long, 'Turn in, my lord, turn in'? But Margaret came to me, she saved me. Listen—can you hear the bells, Abdul? I heard them in the night, they sounded like the bubbling of water. Then peace came, peace, when the woman had sneaked away. Freddy always said I walked on my head, Abdul; he always declared that the whole affair was moonshine, no one in their senses would believe it. I always believe in people who have no sense, for God gives finer *senses* to people who have no sense. Sense never sees beyond, Abdul."

Often he became very wild; broken sentences would pour from his lips, the foolish, unmeaning ravings of a fevered brain.

After these wild outbursts intervals of exhaustion would set in, in which he would lie in a semi-conscious state of stillness. On one such occasion the stillness was suddenly broken by the solemn recitation, in exactly Abdul's devout tones, of the Mohammedan rosary. When he reached the sixty-third attribute of God, he repeated it with great unction. Then his pious tones suddenly changed to a querulous cry.

"Abdul, why do you go on saying 'O Source of Discovery'? You know that we've discovered nothing, nothing at all. It's all mere moonshine. I wish Abdul would stop—he's sitting in the sky above the horizon, repeating those

same silly words over and over again! If I could only get at him . . . but the horizon never gets any nearer." He laughed vulgarly and hoarsely, and then lost the trend of his thoughts. "It was a crimson amethyst—he always kept it in his ear. They buried me, Meg, beside the saint. The sand drifts very quickly, it runs and runs along the surface of the desert, so quickly and silently, like oozing water over a dry river-bed." He gazed wildly at Abdul. "Will you tell my old friend at el-Azhar that I have been dead for a long time? Tell him that the sands drift very quickly. Margaret mustn't cry. The wind is the desert gravedigger. Take your wicked hands away!" Abdul had touched his wrist. "You'll never, never tempt me any more, because I'm dead, I tell you. I was so tired, I got off my camel, and lay down, and you ran away, you little coward. And the sands covered me, and I'm dead, thank God!"

Abdul waited and watched and trusted in Allah. His devotion was complete; he surrendered himself to his master in his material life as completely as he surrendered himself spiritually to his God. And he had his reward, for gradually Michael's youth and splendid constitution asserted themselves; the fever abated—natives have their own wise methods of treating it. There were days when he seemed almost well, far on the way to recovery, but they were often followed by hours of reaction and high delirium. These reactions were familiar to Abdul; they did not depress him. Nevertheless they required time and patience. It was Michael's first attack of fever, and therefore he was able to throw it off more completely than if his system had been undermined by it.

To Abdul his convalescent stage was a time of perfect content. As is often the case with Orientals, he loved his European master with a sentiment and romance which finds no equivalent in Western natures. This sentiment and romance had increased intensely during Michael's illness. Abdul now looked upon him as a personal possession; he had nursed him back to life and health; he was a gift which

Allah had placed in his hands. He had no sons of his own, so his master filled the unforgettable void. His conversion to Islam was Abdul's most earnest prayer.

The only cloud in his blue sky was the knowledge that Michael was disappointed and distressed by the fact that he had not, in some manner or other, let the Effendi Lampton know that he was seriously ill. Abdul could not have written himself, for he could neither read nor write English; he always spoke to Michael in Arabic. It was therefore impossible for him to write to the Effendi Lampton, and to the native mind time was of so little account that one day was as good as another. Besides, deep down in his heart there was a pool of jealousy; he wished to nurse his beloved master back to life and health with his own hands. If the Effendi Lampton knew that he was ill, he would come to him or send someone to wait upon him who would rob him of his sweet work. And to do Abdul justice, he did not know if his master would like any stranger, or even the Effendi Lampton himself, to know all the secrets of his heart which his ravings revealed. Michael had so often expressed the wish to Abdul that it should be from his own lips, or from his own letters, that the Effendi Lampton should hear that the harlot had been with them in the desert, and the whole story of their desert journey.

Abdul was quite convinced that his master's letters had not yet been delivered at the hut in the Valley. It did not seem to him a very long time for a letter to take to travel across the desert and the Nile. The carrying of news was a different matter; he had a native's knowledge of how that can be transmitted with great rapidity. A letter belonged to a widely-different means of communication. And so he let the matter rest.

To the hospitable *Omdeh* he confided nothing. The old man was pleased and delighted to have Michael as his guest. During the patient's rapid recovery, after his first weeks of intermittent convalescence, he was as pleased as a child to be allowed to entertain Michael with all the de-

lights which he had held out before his eyes when he had invited him to spend two or three days with him, before he journeyed to the camp in the hills.

During that time Michael became learned in the points of well-bred gazelles. He saw some native dancers, both male and female, who charmed him with their beauty and their art. And he listened so many times to celebrated *A'lateeyeh* (professional musicians) that, with the help of the *Omdeh*, he became familiar with the remarkable peculiarity in the Arab system of music—its divisions of tones into thirds. Egyptian musicians consider that the European system of music is deficient in sounds. This small and delicate gradation of sound gives a peculiar softness to the performance of good Arab musicians.

At first Michael was unable to appreciate the excellence of the music he listened to, for the finer and more delicate gradations of tone are difficult to discriminate with exactness; they are seldom heard in the vocal and instrumental music of people who have not made a regular study of the art. But as his ear became more habituated to the style, the more it delighted him. He had seen the rapture on Abdul's face and had heard the exclamations of "God approve thee!" "God preserve thee!" from the *Omdeh*, many times before the knowledge came to him. He knew that it was his own ignorance, and not the musicians' lack of skill, which was to blame. Until now he had only been familiar with the music of the Nile boatmen and the popular music of the people.

It was delicious, or so Abdul thought, to sit with his master and the *Omdeh* in the cool garden, under the shade of a fantastic arbour, darkened by the leaves of oleanders and other semi-tropical trees, and there listen to the songs of famous Arab singers, or to the music of the *'ood*, or the *nay*, a picturesque native flute, made out of a reed about half a yard in length, pierced with holes.

Sometimes story-tellers would arrive. One would begin his romance early in the evening and it would not be nearly

finished by bed-time, which came late in the hot summer nights. The reciting of it was broken by pleasant intervals for discussions, or for the sipping of sweet syrups and cool native drinks. The romance always left off at a thrilling point; sometimes it took three evenings to finish it.

Abdul lived in a condition of satisfaction only to be expressed by a Moslem mind. As for Michael, he had never imagined that he could feel himself so much at home and so closely in sympathy with purely native life. He began it at the point in his convalescence when nothing mattered; the path of least resistance was the only one which he could take. He continued in it when he no longer desired to resist.

He had received no word from the Valley or from the outer world. He felt that he was cut off and abandoned. Millicent had no doubt taken pains to let Margaret know that she had been with him in the desert, and what could he expect but that Freddy would be justly indignant?

But he was getting better every day. He had had no return of the fever for some time. Whenever he felt fit to travel, he would go to the Valley and see if he could discover anything of Freddy's whereabouts. Of course, he could not stay there during the hot weather, but the guards in charge of the excavation-site might be able to tell him where he was to be found.

It was no difficult matter for Michael to let things drift, and easier for him under the circumstances than it might otherwise have been.

It was only after his complete recovery, and at the end of his long journey with the faithful Abdul back to the Valley, that he realized the utter desolation which faced him.

He had said good-bye with regret and gratitude to the *Omdeh*, who was every day becoming more concerned about the secret propaganda which was being preached in the desert mosques, and had travelled as quickly as he could, more by train than by camel, back to Luxor. On an afternoon of blistering heat he had crossed the Nile and ridden

over the plain of Thebes. He had to rest for a little time under the cliffs which shelter the great temple of Hatshepsu at Der-el-Bahari, before he continued his journey up the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings, to the hut in the wrinkles of the hills.

As he rode through the Valley, his thoughts were full of his first meeting with Margaret. He remembered how at a certain point of the desolate track, which winds like a dry river-bed through the Theban hills, she had said, "Does Freddy live here all alone?" and how, when he had assured her that Freddy was well guarded by watch-dogs at night, she had said, "But dogs couldn't keep off this!" For Margaret they had not kept off "this," the spirit of Egypt; nothing can keep off Egypt; its power and mystery defy both time and science.

He remembered her almost childish eagerness, when she first listened to his explanation of Akhnaton's beliefs and teachings. Then her vision of the suffering Pharaoh came back to him, and all her arguments against her supersense, which told her that she had seen the spirit of the first divinely-inspired man. He visualized her honest eyes and their expression of interest when he had argued with her that God had revealed Himself to mankind in many individuals and in many countries. Surely she could not believe that God had left a single nation without some revelation of Himself, that He had not sent upon all nations the gift of His Spirit by some redeemer?

Margaret had said, "You mean, don't you, that Christ revealed Himself to all nations?"

Michael had rejected her correction, for Christ was but one of God's manifestations of Himself upon earth. There have been others—Buddha was one, so was Mohammed; all great reformers, and those who are inspired with the spirit of truth, and seek to reveal its beauty to mankind, were to Michael God's revelations of Himself upon earth. He gave to China, Confucius, to India, Krishna, and so on. To Pal-

estine he gave Jesus, Whose teachings have lightened the darkness of the Western world.

"You may call them all Christ or Jesus, if you like," he had said. "For they are all imbued with the same Spirit, which is of God. Jesus has become our ideal and example, He it is Whom God chose to teach a doctrine suited to Western minds."

In the heat and stillness of the Valley Michael pondered in his heart over all the arguments and discussions which he had had with Margaret under the star-lit heavens, or in an expanse of blinding sunlight, which left not a shadow as big as a man's hand on the golden sands of the Sahara.

He was living again in the days which preceded his adventures in the Libyan Desert. Abdul was conscious of his master's total absorption in the thoughts which his return to the Valley had called up. For many weeks the heat of the summer sun had made the Valley like a furnace; even now, though the hottest hours of the day were past, it was stifling and almost unendurable. The air scorched Michael's face like the hot air which comes from an oven when its door is opened.

As they drew near to the hut which had once been his home, the loneliness and desolation became more intense. It hurt Michael indescribably; the contrast between the present and the past was horrible. What he had looked upon as his home, and what had meant for him so much activity of mind and body, was now a mere wilderness. It was an inferno of heat and sandhills; even lizards and scorpions sought the shade. Nothing but the dead Pharaohs under the hills remained to tell him that this had been his Eden, where passion-flowers bloomed.

The wooden hut was bolted and barred and closely shuttered.

"Certainly the family are not at home," he said to Abdul, with grim humour. "There's no good looking for Moham-

med Ali—he won't greet us with his white teeth and smiling eyes."

They halted. Not a movement or sound disturbed the Pharaonic stillness; not a sign of even insect life caught their searching eyes. Abdul drew a native whistle from his pocket and put it to his lips; its sound travelled and echoed round the hills.

Instantly a white turban appeared and the tall figure of a *gaphir* came forward, with his signal of office, a long staff carried in the Biblical manner, in his hand. Tall and bearded, in his flowing white robes, he might have been Moses praying apart in the wilderness, pleading for the children of Israel until the anger of the Lord was turned away.

With inimitable dignity he came towards the two riders, who had so suddenly appeared in the Valley. He was the trusted servant of the Excavation Society; his duty it was to patrol the district which surrounded the freshly-opened tomb, the one which Freddy had discovered; his duty it was also to see that no harm came to the hut, to which the Effendi Lampton would return in the autumn.

When Michael asked him for information about the Effendi Lampton, he threw back his head. He had heard nothing from him, or about him, since he had left the Valley and that was in the second week in May. He had gone away in a great hurry, and had left some of the settling of his papers and the packing of his *antikas* which were in the hut, in charge of the Effendi King. When Michael questioned him if the *Sitt*, his sister, had remained with him until he left the Valley, the *gaphir* appeared uncertain; he, personally, had not seen the *Sitt*, but then he had only come to take up his job the day before Mistrr Lampton had gone away; the *Sitt* might have been there—he did not know.

As the dignified personage seemed to be disinclined to volunteer any information, and he was unable to give Michael a satisfactory answer to the questions he asked him,

there was nothing else to do but to let him return to his meditations. Michael supposed that there were native mounted police in the Valley, whom the man could call to his assistance if any trouble arose; they would appear from some sheltered fold in the hills in answer to his signal.

Down the Valley of Death, in which the flames of the inferno seemed to have licked and scorched the dry air ever since the world was created, Michael rode with Abdul at his side. He had turned his back on the hut, for the place thereof knew him no more. Freddy and Margaret had left it; it was as though their presence there had never been. He knew that he had been foolish to hope to find either Freddy or Margaret in the Valley; it was far too late in the season and too hot for any excavating work in Egypt. This he had been conscious of, but in his heart he felt the urging necessity of going to the Valley and proving the fact with his own eyes. Perhaps there was hidden in the back of his mind a hope that some message had been left there for him, that Freddy would have known that even if it was midsummer before his journey was accomplished, he would return there as soon as he could; something would draw him to the scene of their united labour and happiness.

But Freddy's practical mind had not thought of any such folly; he had left the Valley to the sun by day and the stars by night, and had gone like the swallows to a cooler and greener land.

* * * * *

Michael was compelled to spend that night at Luxor. His urgent desire was to reach Cairo as quickly as possible and discover if the Iretons knew anything of Freddy and Margaret. They were now his one hope. In Luxor the fine European hotels were closed, so he found accommodation in the house of one of Abdul's friends, a clean, well-managed native inn. Luxor in May was without one blot or blemish of foreign life.

The next day he travelled by train to Cairo. The new

moon was just appearing in the evening sky when he found himself nearing the Iretons' ancient Mameluke mansion. With the absence of all tourists and European life, the mediæval city seemed to Michael so Biblical that he would not have been astonished if he had come across the city magistrates, sitting apart in conclave to hear the witnesses of the new moon's appearance and settle the time. He could picture the scientific men in their midst, making their astronomical calculations, and judging whether the testimonies agreed with their calculations. If they did, the president of the assembly proclaimed the new moon by the sound of a trumpet, and set open the gate of Nicanor, the great eastern brazen gate of the temple.

But instead of the trumpet proclaiming the new moon, Michael heard the sonorous cries of the *mueddin*, calling out the hour of Moslem prayer from the galleries round the tall minarets, which rose from the city like the lotus-headed columns of ancient Egypt. All the large mosques in Cairo are open from daybreak until two hours after sunset. The great university-mosque of el-Azhar would, Michael knew, remain open all night, all but one small portion, the principal place of prayer.

When he reached the Iretons' house, he rang the bell at the door of the outer courtyard. The Nubian who was stretched out on the *mastaba* behind it did not trouble to rouse himself. Let the fool ring—surely everyone knew that his master and mistress were not living in the city in this weather, when they had a beautiful mansion in the cool oasis to go to?

Michael rang again, but even as he rang his heart was beginning to sink; he knew that no servant would have kept a guest waiting behind the big door if his master was at home; it was his one and only duty to guard it and admit visitors. The second time he rang, he did it so emphatically that the noise vibrated through the courtyard.

A moment later Michael heard a movement. The bar was lifted from its iron hooks, the door was grudgingly opened,

and a black face, with thick lips and goggle eyes, was thrust out. In a great many more words than were necessary the Nubian told the anxious Michael that his master and mistress were away from home; they were in the country; the house was closed and would not be opened until October.

When Michael urged him for more particulars, as to the precise address of his master, the effusive Nubian became as close as a sphinx. His duty to his master forbade him giving any information to strangers at the gate; he only retained the post because he could be trusted.

As Michael looked into the deserted courtyard, its sense of romantic isolation was as affecting as the desolation of the Valley had been. It seemed to him as if all his friends were dead, as if he was the sole survivor of his generation and civilization. The native city, bathed in the mystery of the falling night and the secrets of its great age, lay behind him. It, too, was a world which had outlived its civilization, a relic of the Middle Ages, as lonely as his own soul.

Mechanically he bade the Nubian good-night; the half-piastre which he dropped into the pink palm of his black hand brought down blessings on his unbelieving head.

He wandered aimlessly on. He was very tired and absolutely friendless; he had no place or part in the city, whose arteries were throbbing with the prayers and praise of an infinite variety of Oriental peoples, peoples whose countries were separated by oceans and continents, joined in one vast brotherhood in Islam. He felt miserably alone, a homeless and friendless alien.

At the hour which follows sundown Egypt has always new secrets to reveal. On this night of the new moon, the late afterglow of the summer sun spread an opal haze, flame-tinted and milky, over the sin-soiled city of the Caliphs. It descended from the heavens like a veil of righteousness.

Michael had no desire to return to his hotel. He did not know what to do; the absence of the Iretons from Cairo

had shattered his last hope. Surely it was ordained? He was to realize that he was reaping the punishment he deserved for his weakness and folly. It was obvious to his tired nerves and hypercritical senses that Margaret had purposely returned to England without leaving any indication of her destination. He would go to Cook's post-office the next morning; that was his last forlorn hope. If there was no letter awaiting him there, he would take his dismissal as final. It had been he himself who had insisted that Margaret should consider herself free.

He knew Freddy's English address, but dared he write to him? He had ignored all his letters and had gone back to England without making any effort to communicate with him. This was certainly his dismissal. And if Margaret had gone also without leaving one word of comfort for him, he must draw the same conclusion from her silence.

Tired out with walking through the narrow streets, he stood on the steps of a small mosque, whose doors were closed. He must think over what he ought to do. As his eyes rested on the Eastern scene before him, a sudden vision of his old friend at el-Azhar came to him. The university-mosque would not be closed, its gate would open and receive him into the Perfection of Peace.

For a few moments the desire to throw himself into the arms of Islam overwhelmed him; it was the way of peace, the way of forgetfulness, the way of self-surrender.

He remembered Abdul's teachings, and how he had often said, "A sort of death comes over the first life, and this state is signified by the word Islam, for Islam brings about death of the passions of the flesh and gives new life to us. This is the true regeneration, and the word of God must be revealed to the person who reaches this stage. This stage is termed 'the meeting of God.'"

Michael imagined that he would find that stage if he went to his old friend at el-Azhar, if he went humbly and asked him to lead him into the way of peace, if he went that very night and confessed to him his own failure to reach

the stage which is enjoyed by all devout Moslems. The burning fire which is Islam, the fire which consumes all low desires and gives to men that love for God which knows no bounds, would that be his state if he surrendered himself intellectually and spiritually to the laws and the teachings of the Koran?

There was nothing in the ethics or the moral code of the Prophet with which he disagreed; the excellence of his teachings as laid down in the Koran was extraordinarily far-reaching and comprehensive. Michael's whole being for the moment was filled with the devotion and abandonment of Islam. Mohammed's mission was to turn the hearts of his people to the worship of the one and only God; his desire, like Akhnaton's, was to throw down the false gods from the altars, and reinstate the simple and undivided worship of the Creator in men's hearts and minds. To Michael, his teachings had always been the teachings of a great and inspired reformer. At that moment, when the spell of Islam was baptizing him, he forgot that Mohammed's God was not the Sweet Singer in the spring-time, or the bright eye of the daisy in June, or the laughter of the babbling brooks. The beauty of God, to the Moslem, consists in His unity, His majesty, His grandeur and His lofty attributes. Michael overlooked the difference. He loved to walk with God in the cornfields, to speak to Him when he visited the lotus-gardens on the Nile. The Moslem succeeds in abandoning himself to God's will, but he fails to enjoy Him in the scent of the hawthorn, or hear His voice in the whisper of the pines.

The Moslem city was pouring into his veins the beauty of its spiritual calm; the hour was kind to its imperfections, its hidden sores were forgotten.

His feet mechanically descended the flights of stone steps which had raised him above the level of the street and had placed him under the shadow of the ancient doorway of the mosque. Without asking himself where he was going, or

what he intended to do, he walked in the direction of el-Azhar.

As he threaded his way through the narrow streets, darkness was quickly obliterating the dirt and unsightliness which was visible in the noonday. His mind was vexed with a thousand questions. Why did a Western civilization and the Protestant religion make human beings restless and questioning? Why were they forever desiring the things which are withheld? Why had his life and his interests suddenly tottered to the ground? Surely it was because he had not learned to put the things of the spirit above things material. If he resigned his will to Islam, would he in return be granted the calm philosophy of a Moslem, who accepts his condition and his disappointments as the unquestionable and far-seeing decree of the Cause of all causes?

Drifting and dreaming, Michael wandered on, the summer heavens above him, the mediæval city surrounding him. The hot day's work was over; men and women were enjoying in their Oriental fashion the cooler and sweeter air of the late evening. Portly figures of elderly men were descending the high steps which raise the mosque-doors from the level of the street; narrow, two-wheeled carts, of immense length, packed full of black bundles—Egyptian women closely veiled—were taking tired workers back to their homes in the suburbs. Darkness, which falls so quickly and early in the East, even in mid-summer, was bringing relief to sun-tired eyes.

Reaction was affecting Michael very strongly. It had only set in when the absence of the Iretons from Cairo had suddenly opened up a chasm of distrust and doubt before his feet. In his desolate wandering through the city, Margaret seemed very far away. Indeed, he had never felt any assurance of her sympathy and presence since he had recovered from his illness. He had nerved and braced himself to make the supreme effort which he knew would be demanded of him if he was to reach the Valley; he had made it wholly unaided by any subconscious sense of her spiritual

presence. His assurance of her unchanged confidence in his devotion had left him. It was to his material, not spiritual, will-power and determination that he owed his victory over the physical exhaustion which he had experienced.

He scarcely thought of Margaret as he wandered on; in his mood of self-pity he felt abandoned. Every minute he was drawing nearer and nearer to the gates of el-Azhar. Unconsciously he desired that when he reached the gate which led into the Court of the Perfection of Peace, it would open, and strong arms would gather him up as they had gathered him up in the Libyan Desert, and drown his restlessness and doubts in their strength; that he might spend his future at rest under the shadow of the Everlasting Arms—The God of Akhnaton, the God of Jesus, the God of Mohammed, His Arms encompass and enfold the world.

At the gates of el-Azhar Michael paused and listened. The praises of Allah, and man's love for Him, went up from a hundred devout voices. The pillared courtyard looked vast and solemn; the soft air of the summer night vibrated with the sonorous chanting of students and professors. The peace of God which passeth all understanding beautified the mediæval building, which has been for long centuries the centre of culture and learning for the scattered Moslem world. It baptized Michael's fevered soul as the waters of Jordan baptized those who were converts of the forerunner of Jesus. Centuries of meditation and prayer have left their divine influence on the place.

All sacred enclosures hold the gift of healing. Michael had felt it in the temples of Egypt, in the temples of the Greeks, in the mosques. The things of the spirit remain in them, the thoughts which have been born by communion with the soul.

Impulsively Michael lifted the iron handle of the bell; it hung from a long chain which lay against a square column, one of the two posts at the outer gate. Here was the rest he was seeking, the beauty of divine meditation.

As he lifted the handle and his palm pressed it with the tightening grasp necessary for pulling it, he let it drop. Something made him drop it. He had ardently desired to ring it; it was not the lateness of the hour, or the nervousness which he might well have felt at taking a step which would lead him into fresh perplexity and doubt, which had made him pause. He had dropped it because he was compelled to, and as he dropped it, he knew that he would never again ring it for the same purpose. His super-self had triumphed; it had dominated his actions.

Suddenly the overwhelming significance of the step which he had been about to take so rashly made him tremble and feel apprehensive. He turned round quickly, as if he expected to see the hand which had stayed him. No one was there. He stood tense, perfectly still, listening. Only the prayers from the courts of Islam came to his ears. Mingled with their solemnity, came with vivid clearness the picture of himself, seated on the marble floor of the courtyard, pretending that he was one in heart and soul with the others. He could see their devotion, their bridled intellects, their impersonal minds, strange peoples of every Oriental nation —black Nubians, pale Arabs, flat-featured Mongolians— all sincere and honest in this one thing at least, their absolute belief in, and surrender to Islam. He saw himself, a Western, with a Western mind; he saw himself a hypocrite and charlatan. He saw the deadly monotony of the life which only a moment before had seemed the Way of Perfect Peace. His old friend, who had given him such wonderful counsel, would have read into his heart; he would have seen there the vast difference which lay between Michael's sincere beliefs and the beliefs which he was professing.

Resolutely he turned his back on the university-mosque. He would visit his friend at a more suitable hour, and ask him to explain to him some of the things that had happened. He would ask him if he was aware that his desert journey had, in a material sense at least, ended in failure,

if his seer's vision had enabled him to discover what had happened to the treasure.

On his way back to the European quarter of Cairo he rested for a short time by the roadside, in a strange little cemetery of poor Moslem tombs. It lay exposed to the turmoil and dust of a rough road, a sun-baked spot in the daytime; at night it was grimly mysterious. The memorial stones—the humbler for the women, of course, the grander ones, with turbans cut in the grey stone, for the men—had sunk into the ground until they stood at strange angles. The rough white stones had become grey with age, and many of them were sadly broken.

A donkey-boy, who had perchance taken some portly Turkish merchant back to his home in the country after his day's work in the city, came hurrying down the hill. It was steep, and loose stones covered the path. When he reached the dilapidated cemetery he pulled up his suffering animal. Michael, from his hidden corner, watched the boy fling himself from the donkey's back; the animal remained motionless, while its rider, in his one garment—a short white shirt, which only reached to the knees of his tanned legs—stepped in amongst the gravestones. Finding the one he sought, he said a short prayer beside it in devout tones, then hastened back to his donkey. When he started down the hill and the tired beast stumbled, he belaboured it with a heavy stick and cursed it. His foul language rang out into the stillness; it echoed among the stones under which lay the bones of his ancestor—or was it, perhaps, the bones of some humble saint, whose favour he was inciting?

The little incident was as illustrative of the effects of Islam as the peace within the courts of el-Azhar.

Michael sat in the cemetery, which had seemed to him to be of no more consequence than a heap of stones by the wayside, awaiting the roadmender's hammer. Yet, with the strange inconsequence of Orientals, it was evidently a sacred spot. It had its pilgrims and its uses. This city cemetery brought to his mind the drifting sand of the open desert,

and the ever-increasing mound which Nature was piling up over the bones of the holy man, which lay in an ocean of sweet silence and expanse.

## CHAPTER XXIII

EARLY the next morning Michael again stood at the gate of the university-mosque, but it was a different Michael to the Michael of the night before. The unseen hand which had stopped him when he was about to ring the bell did not have to interfere a second time. He rang it resolutely, thinking calm thoughts, and despising himself for his foolish mood of the night before.

When the gate was opened to him, he passed in and hurried across the blinding brightness of the open courtyard. He made haste to reach the shelter of the colonnade; he was in no drifting humour; he was again asserting his capacity for being practical about the unpractical. He did not even allow himself to dwell on the memories which the scene recalled of the day when he had visited his friend, before he determined to leave the Valley and go into the Libyan Desert.

When he reached the portion of the building where the old African student lived, his steps slackened. What if he was dead? He was an old man for a mid-African, and his physique had been greatly exhausted by continued chastening of the flesh.

When he was well within sight of his cell he saw the lean, gaunt figure of the hermit-student standing inside the iron-barred gate; he was straining his eyes into the distance; he was looking for someone.

When Michael was near enough to address him, which he did in tones of pleasure and respect, the African opened the gate slowly and not without difficulty, his trembling

hands thinner and more bloodless even than they had been when Michael had visited him before.

After the proper greetings were exchanged, the African invited Michael to enter, and asked him if he would lend a patient ear to what he had to tell him.

"I am an old man," he said. "I can see the end of this existence—it is not far off. It is well that you have come."

When Michael expressed his sorrow, the tired eyes flashed.

"Do not grieve, my son. When the righteous servant of God sees death face to face, he does not contend with his God—that is to oppose His will, that is not in accordance with total resignation."

Michael said that his grief was for himself, not for his friend; his words were an apology. The old man had seated himself in a humble attitude on the floor in front of Michael; with the never-failing courtesy of an Oriental, he was not forgetful of the etiquette which prescribes for the seating of oneself in the presence of a superior. There is always a position of honour in a native room, and this, even in his cell, the zealot of Islam reserved for his professors and for his honoured guests, if they were his social superiors.

When they were seated and the tired old man had rested for a few moments, he said, in the lengthy and flowery style of Orientals:

"I looked for you, my son; your coming was foretold. I have long and eagerly awaited it."

"Were you watching for me?" Michael asked. "I saw you at the door of your cell. I am glad I came."

"Even as you came, I looked for you. The Lord of Kindness knows the desires of our hearts; He grants all those which in His mercy He deems fit."

"You desired to see me, O my father?"

"*Aiwah*, for long I have desired it."

A rosary was in his hands; he pulled the beads slowly

along the string. Michael had learned to banish impatience in the presence of natives.

"I have been in great tribulation," he said. "Did you know that? I am even yet sorely troubled."

The African answered with his eyes.

"O Lord, give us in our affliction the contentment of mind which may give us patience."

"My peace of mind has gone, O my father. I feel that my feet have strayed far from the way of peace. I came to hear your counsel."

The old man's eyes flamed with the fire of righteousness. "My son," he said, "the Lord has revealed to His dying servant the things which as yet you know not. You speak of peace where there is no peace, for I have seen the Armageddon of God's enemies; I have seen the world washed in the blood of those who know not Islam; I have seen the heathen nations of the earth blind with rage. Why do these nations of the earth so furiously rage together? I tell you, O my son, it is because they have not the love of God in their hearts."

Michael was silent. The old man's words conveyed very little to him, for as yet there was no rumour of the war which was breeding in Europe. The internal troubles in Ireland, distressing as they were, were not of a nature to be spoken of with such appalling gravity. The old man's anxiety and sincerity were unmistakable, but what did he mean? While he sat in silence, wondering what the seer had in his mind, Michael saw that his dark eyes were far away. His attitude was that of one who had detached himself from his surroundings; his spirit was immeasurably removed from his material body. Suddenly he spoke.

"Take heed, my son, for everywhere, even unto the ends of the earth I can see bloodshed and suffering, and an agony of evil such as the world has never seen. I can see nations rising against nations, and the blood of kindred spilt by each other's swords, for they know not God."

Michael, not without a feeling of mental irritation, lis-

tened to the African's foretelling. It seemed to him the imaginings of a zealot's weakening brain. This war which he foretold was to Michael an impossible thing amongst civilized nations, but he listened patiently to all that he had to say. Blood which was to pour like a river over the Western world, was to be spilt for the cause of Truth; it was to be the punishment and final agony of the unbelievers; war was to spread over the world like a deadly plague. God in His wisdom had willed it, for it was to be a proof that the infidels, who had flourished like the green bay-trees, were at last to suffer the vengeance of God. This war, which he saw as clearly as astrologers see the stars and the moon in the heavens through their scientific instruments, was ordained by Allah, it was the work of His hand, it was His terrible revelation to mankind of the falseness of the doctrines preached by those who called themselves the followers of Christ. For nearly two thousand years they had fed the nations on lies and set up images which were abhorrent to the one and only God. They had, to suit their own doctrines and dogmas, perverted the meaning of the words of Jesus; they had made the name of Christ a byword to all true believers. The sin of hate and the lust for blood, which was to fill the hearts of all Christian countries, was to be a token to all true believers that the teachings of Christians had been vain and fruitless. They had lived without God in their hearts; now even the example of the Prophet Jesus they laughed to scorn.

"God is alone in His personal attributes; He has no partner. He is neither a Son nor a Father, for there is none of His kind."

Knowing the religious fervour of devout Moslems, Michael listened to his warning, but without the interest which he would have felt if he had had the slightest inkling of the agony which was so soon to convulse Europe. He thought that as the African's end was not far off, he was becoming more troubled and desirous for the conversion of the world to Islam. He said to himself, "If he knows nothing about

my experience in the desert and my failure to find the treasure, I will give no second thought to this imaginary war of nations." While he listened to his strange and fervent warnings, he determined to find out if he knew what had happened. When the African paused, he said:

"Pray tell me, O my father, if it was known to you the things that befell me in the desert. If not, I have much to tell you."

The African was far away; only his emaciated body was in the cell when Michael spoke; when he drew back his mind to his material presence, he met Michael's questioning eyes; his own were tragic and stricken.

"These things are past, my son; in this new world of despair and suffering there is no place for them. Very often I saw you, very often you were in great trouble, trouble as the world understood trouble in the days of peace. But because of the avarice of ungodly rulers there is sorrow and mourning coming to the world, which will teach men that they know not the meaning of anguish. In the Armageddon they will understand the suffering of the Prophet Jesus, the Man of Sorrows Who was acquainted with grief."

Michael, convinced that the seer's mind was obsessed with this one idea, accepted the fact philosophically; he shrank from asking him the more personal questions he wished answered. Nevertheless, he was extremely curious to learn if he was ignorant of the result of his expedition.

"Tell me, my father, did you see me securing the great treasure of gold and jewels which I went into the desert to find? Did you know how greatly I have reaped my reward?"

"My son, speak to me of the truth which is in thy heart, not of lies." His angry eyes rebuked Michael. "Stand fast to truth and justice. The men of truth shall find a rich reward—they do not sit in the company of liars."

"I ask your forgiveness, O my father. Truly I spoke not after the fashion of those who have understanding."

"My son, I have seen what I have seen. Your deeds of charity are known to God, His power extends over all things; not a chicken cheeps in the egg-shell but He has created. Your trials and losses are known to Him, they are His ordaining. Because of your weakness and the carnal thoughts and desires which were in your heart, God saw fit to remove the treasure from your sight. Again in the days of peace you must seek it, in the bowels of the earth it is laid up for you."

Michael's heart stood still. Verily the old man had seen, for in his words there were truth and meaning.

"My son, listen to the teachings of the Prophet, God bless His holy name. 'Believing men should restrain their eyes from looking upon strange women, whose sight may excite their carnal passions. Draw not near unto fornication. The word of God restrains the carnal desires of man even from smouldering in secret.' "

"You know, O my father, that I sought not the presence of the strange woman in my camp?"

"My son, through the grace of Allah I have seen. Your temptation was great, your charity was acceptable in God's sight. He knows that many unbelievers look towards Him, but do not see Him."

"And what now is thy counsel, O my father?"

The African shook his head. "Prayer, my son, that is my counsel. The world has much need of prayer. Pray that through Allah's guidance all nations of the earth may learn how to live peacefully one with another. I can see nothing further; that is my counsel: Work and pray. I can give you no assurance, but Allah granting, I will pray without ceasing. You must humbly submit to the will of Allah. This I give you as my counsel. You took the great journey; your heart is still filled with the eagerness of youth, with the vanity of earthly ambition. But all these things will be purged from your heart, your bowels of compassion will yearn for the mothers of sons, who weep for their sons because they are not. Your journey was not

in vain. If your fingers have not yet touched the treasure which you sought, if your desires have strayed from the path of righteousness, if you have not always stood in the Light, there is a new treasure laid up in your heart, my son, the treasure of meekness. Meekness is one of the moral conditions of the Koran, and the servants of the All-Merciful are those who walk meekly upon earth. This treasure has been revealed to you, you have learned many strange and wonderful things, a spiritual treasure has been bestowed upon you which is of greater richness than the gold and the jewels which you sought. You dreamed not of man's weakness, O my son, you relied upon your own strength. Allah has chosen His own method of revealing to you the manner of man's carnal nature."

Michael remained lost in thought while the old man finished his counsel by reciting a beautiful *sura* from the Koran. In his mind there had been gathering the conviction that there was more truth than he had at first imagined in his daring prophecy, in his foretelling of the calamity which was to befall all Christian countries. He had been perfectly accurate on the subject of his own journey, that it had not been successful in regard to the treasure of Akhnaton. He had seen with extraordinary clearness all which had happened, even to the reading of his heart. It was unnecessary for Michael to tell him in words all that he had gone through, for the African was tired, and his eyes had seen. There was just one thing he had been craving to ask him about; it had been glowing at the back of his mind like a light from a sacred lamp. That precious thing was Margaret. Had this mid-African, whose feet were bending to the open grave, any seer's knowledge which would assist him?

"I would ask you yet one more question, O my father. Of my dear friends, whom I left in Upper Egypt when I journeyed into the desert—have you counsel regarding them which will ease the anxiety I feel?"

The old man's eyes flashed brightly. He had forgot-

ten; his voice was expressive of human sympathy. "Your guarded lady, *insha Allah*, the future mother of your sons, she was never far from you, she it was who many times comforted you. Often have I seen her spiritual presence very close to you."

"Your words are the truth, O my father. When the weakness of man's nature overwhelmed me, she came to me in the desert."

"Spiritually you embraced her, my son; Allah, in His perfect understanding, granted you this great comfort."

"I have not heard from her, my father, nor has her spiritual presence been close to me for many weeks. My heart is desolate."

"Pray for fortitude, my son, that moral condition which enables us to meet danger and endure pain with calmness." As he said the last words, his eyes looked into the future; his expression became agonized. "Fortitude," he repeated the words slowly and deliberately, "fortitude—you must pray for it without ceasing, for without it you cannot face the future."

"You do not explain, O my father, why I do not see or hear anything from those who love me."

Michael had seen by the visionary's expression that his thoughts were again obsessed with the Armageddon he had visualized.

The African shook his head. "Some things I may not see, O my son, Allah withholds them from my imperfect human understanding. It is only by His ordaining that I can see what I see. If your heart is clean and worthy, my son, doubt not the faithfulness and steadfastness of the woman to whom you are spiritually united. She raises not her eyes to strange men; if by your own weakness you have lost your spiritual connection with her, then hasten to act worthily of her. The world will have need of all those who have the love of God in their hearts, of all those who have the moral quality of forgiveness and sympathy. It is an easy matter to forgive those whom we love. Go you forth

into battle and learn to forgive those whom you hate. Never have your opportunities been greater."

As his last words were uttered, with extreme earnestness, through the colonnade and courtyard of the ancient building came the midday call to prayer; it was sonorous and prolonged.

Michael rose hastily from his low seat. The aged student did not detain him. Their farewell was comparatively brief, owing to the *mueddin's* harmonious and sonorous chanting of the *adan*.

"I will return," Michael said. "I will not leave Egypt without saying farewell to you, O my father, and asking for thy blessing."

"*Insha Allah* (if God wills), my son. Very soon God will permit His servant to enjoy the blessings of paradise."

"It will not be many days before I go to England."

"*Aiwah*, the time draws near when each man will return to the land which gave him birth. The Lord of Battles has decreed it, the Lord of Battles will send forth His summons. From the uttermost ends of the earth all those who have denied Him, all those who have denied that He is God beside Whom there is none other to be worshipped, they will answer to the call: with pride in their hearts they will slaughter those who should be their brethren. The voice of the slain will travel even as the wind travels to the world's end. Woe unto those nations who have taught false doctrines, who have stretched out their hands to oppress the widows and the helpless, for the anger of the God of Battles is turned against them. He knows everything, and nothing lies hidden from His sight."

Michael made no answer. His mind was groping after the true understanding of all that the African said.

"If Allah had so willed it, my son, great would have been my happiness, my rejoicing, to see the final triumph of Islam, to see the nations upon the earth loving each other, all borders and barriers broken down, to see the love of God ruling all men and all countries. When men live with

the image of the true God in their hearts, there will be no dividing barriers. True patriots will be the obedient children of God, the banner of Islam the universal banner of mankind. Farewell, my son, God be with you."

His gate was shut behind Michael; the lean figure hastened to obey the call to prayer.

As Michael hurried to the outer gate and crossed the thronged courts of el-Azhar, he meditated on the old man's words. What did they mean? What had his eyes seen? Locked away in his obscure cell in the centre of the Moslem university-mosque, how could he know what was going to happen in the great countries of Europe? He would find it difficult, no doubt, to assign to England her correct position on the map. And yet his warnings were strangely intense. Had they any connection with the tales of political sedition of which the *Omdeh* had so often spoken? Nothing belonging to the present seemed to matter to him now; his thoughts and visualizing were riveted on the agony of the world which he foretold. His prayers were for this new agony and world-wide disaster which had been revealed to him.

It was strangely perplexing. Michael felt great pity for him, that his last few weeks on earth should be so saddened; even though he was convinced that this agony was to be for the final triumph of Islam, it was tearing at his bowels of compassion. His gentle nature was suffering for the children whom Allah now saw fit to punish.

## *PART III*

### CHAPTER I

THE war was six months old and Margaret was still a pantry-maid in the private hospital in St. Alphege's Square. She was to be promoted to the wards in a few weeks' time, to fill the place of a V.A.D. who was going out to France. Before taking up her more interesting work, she had been granted a fortnight's leave; the exacting matron realized that the willing horse which works its hardest is one which will eventually collapse under its burden.

Margaret was now visiting an aunt in a northern town, drinking in the keen air of the winter hills and the resin of the pine-woods. She was conscientiously building up her tired system, fitting herself for fresh endeavours; she considered that her brief holiday had been given her for this purpose. Her health and capacity for work were the two assets which she could give to the war; it was as much a matter of duty to nurse that capital and increase it as it was the duty of the engineers on a ship to keep the driving power of the vessel in perfect order.

During her holiday the only form of war-work which she allowed herself to do, except the mechanical one of knitting, was to help at a railway-station canteen, which supplied free meals to all the soldiers and sailors who passed through. The aunt whom she was visiting had the entire responsibility for the free-refreshment-room for one of the shifts for two nights in the week; her shift began at six and ended at nine o'clock. Punctually at nine o'clock another member of the canteen, or "barrow-fund," as it was called, took the responsibility off her hands and kept it until two-thirty

a.m. Margaret's aunt asked her to take the place of a helper who had suddenly been telegraphed for to see a wounded brother who had just arrived at a hospital in Edinburgh.

At the large station, a very important junction, the third-class ladies' waiting-room had been given over to this energetic body of women war-workers, who had converted it into an attractive refreshment-room. Margaret was established behind the buffet in her V.A.D.'s uniform. The wide counter in front of her was covered with cups and plates, piled high with tempting sandwiches and bread and butter, cakes and scones; immense urns, full to the brim with steaming coffee and tea, gleamed brightly on a wide shelf behind her. Everything was in readiness, and there were a few minutes to spare before the first train was due, which would bring a bevy of hungry men into the hospitable room. Margaret used those few minutes to make a tour of inspection; she had to see that plenty of post-cards and writing materials were in evidence on the centre table, that the illustrated papers were conspicuously displayed. The barrow, or the moving refreshment buffet, was already out on the platform; it served the men who had no time to leave their carriages. It was winter, so flowers were scarce, but hardly a night passed but there was a fresh bouquet on the counter and table. The owners of large country-houses saw to that. The dominoes and draught-boards had been forgotten; Margaret put them on the table in the centre of the room. And then, satisfied that all was right, she took up her position again behind the counter. She was to be responsible for the serving of the tea and coffee; the men helped themselves to the contents of the plates. Her aunt attended to the tea and coffee urns, keeping them replenished and their contents in good condition. Margaret's was distinctly the pleasanter work of the two.

The sharp air of the north had brought back the glow to Margaret's eyes and a freshness to her rather London-

bleached cheeks. She looked a deliciously fresh and pleasing waitress in her crisp indoor V.A.D. uniform. The red cross on the front of her apron was as becoming to her as a bunch of scarlet geraniums. It was too hot, standing so near the steaming urns, for hats and coats, so she had the advantage of showing her rippling hair. The cosy atmosphere of the room made her forgetful of the severity of the wintry atmosphere outside. Margaret's pretty figure and dark head appearing above the buffet-counter were certainly great assets to the free-refreshment-room. Her aunt, who was a conscientiously undemonstrative woman, felt proud of her niece. She more than once that evening thought to herself what pleasure the girl's beauty would give to the men. It was unfortunately against her principles to allow Margaret to even guess how much she both approved of her and admired her.

Her aunt's thoughts were correct. Margaret's pretty head and her dark eyes were remembered by many an aching heart that night; from her hands the tea and coffee they drank had more flavour than that which was so casually dispensed to them in the army canteens.

"Here they come, Margaret!" her aunt called out, as the door opened and a crowd of khaki-clad figures poured into the room. Most of their faces brightened as they saw the inviting buffet.

They had only twenty minutes in which to enjoy their refreshment and change trains; most of them were going to London. This was only one of the many train-loads of men which would visit the room that night. There were about forty men, pushing and elbowing their way to the counter.

With a sharp-spouted, blue-enamelled tin jug in her hand, Margaret began her work, quickly filling the empty cups on the counter. As fast as her active movements would allow her she filled and refilled the saucerless cups. What seemed a never-ending stream of men pushed forward and tried to get closer to the counter.

"Help yourselves, please, to sandwiches and cakes," came

[illegible]

[illegible] It was exceptionally difficult not to spill any of it when cups were held up to be refilled.

[illegible] difficulty [illegible] He held up his cup, thinking that it would make it easier for Margaret to [illegible] it. Before filling it, she ventured to say, "Would you rather have some coffee?"

[illegible] Some curious sense of the man's [illegible] personality had made her think that coffee might appeal to him. As she did so, Michael's Irish-blue eyes gazed back into hers.

For a moment the world stood still for Margaret. Her poor heart beat so quickly that her hand gave a spasmodic shake, with the result that a considerable quantity of the tea from the enamelled jug splashed over the brim and drenched a plate of scones.

Michael had not spoken, nor could Margaret. What she

had waited so long to ask him could not be called out over a dozen eager heads.

A kilted Scot, broad-faced and broad-kneed, had pushed himself in front of Michael, who recognized that it was his duty to step back from the counter now that his cup was full, and allow the man just behind him to get his chance.

Margaret had to go on filling white cups with tea. She dared not even raise her eyes to see if she could catch sight of Michael above the crowd of khaki figures. It was hopeless now, for another train had brought in a fresh batch of weary, cold, homesick men, all eager for a hot cup of tea. Most of the first-comers had already disappeared; one or two of them were hastily addressing with pen and ink the pencilled post-cards which they had written in the train. The writing of many post-cards seemed to afford them great comfort. While Margaret was filling cups as fast as she could, she was often interrupted by men who would hold out a penny and ask if she kept postage-stamps. Stamps were the only things which were not given away in the free-refreshment-room; a copper always went into the little red box when a stamp was taken out. The men were eager to get them.

Another voice would ask for a time-table, and another would inquire if she sold pipes; he had lost his in the train and he dreaded the twelve hours' journey which lay before him without the comfort of even his pipe.

All these demands had to be attended to quickly and sympathetically. The twenty minutes which the first batch of men had to spend in the station was almost up. On record nights the canteen had served three hundred men in half an hour. Margaret felt rather than knew that Michael was still in the room, that he was standing behind the first line of men, looking at her. Her heart was throbbing and her mind distracted. How could she reach him? How could she learn where he was going to?

His eyes had told her nothing; they had simply gazed into hers as though he had seen a vision. Of the surprise

and relief which hers had afforded him she knew nothing. In the midst of the hurly-burly of hungry, tired soldiers she had met his eyes—that was all. She had scarcely seen his figure.

The place was emptying. Michael, having stayed to the very last second, turned and quickly left the room. Soon there would be a lull, but Margaret could not wait for it. She put down her can as Michael disappeared and moved down the counter to its exit, a little door which opened inwards and allowed her to pass into the room. To reach it she had to brush past her aunt. As she did so, she said as calmly as she could:

"I must fly out to the platform for a few minutes, aunt, even if these men go without their tea—I really must go and speak to a soldier I know."

Her aunt looked at her in astonishment. This new emotional Margaret was so very unlike the reliable V.A.D., whose dignity was one of her individual charms.

"Very well, my dear, I can manage. Go along."

There was no time for more words—indeed, Margaret did not wait to be allowed. She darted out of the refreshment-room like an arrow freed from the bow. She had but one idea, to follow Michael. When the door closed behind her, she gazed up the wide expanse of platform. She caught sight of him, but he was well ahead, and he was walking very quickly. Even if she ran, she doubted if she could catch him. After the heat of the room, the air was bitingly cold. Margaret did not feel it; her eyes were trying to keep Michael's khaki-clad figure in sight.

She tried, but failed, for soon he was lost in the crowd of men who were boarding the train. Bevies of women and girls and children had gathered on the platform to see their relatives leave for the Front. Before Margaret's flying feet could overtake Michael he had jumped into a carriage and was as completely lost to sight as a needle in a stack of hay. He was a common Tommy, as heavily-laden, Margaret thought, as an Arab-porter, with his accoutrements of war.

All the window seats in the train had been taken up long before he entered it, so it was quite impossible for her to distinguish him amongst the late-comers who were struggling to find even standing-room.

Margaret stood for a moment or two in breathless despair. What could she do? He was there somewhere, in that very train. She was standing beside it, and yet she could not even see him. She was only wasting time; her sense of duty urged her to return to the hungry men in the refreshment-room. Had she forgotten how eager and longing everyone of them was for something to drink?

Her conscience might urge her, but for this once she was a human, love-hungry girl, as eager to speak to her man as the men were to swallow big mouthfuls of tea. With tear-blinded eyes she saw the train leave the platform; she had allowed herself that extension of time. After all, if the soldiers' throats were starved for moisture, had not the whole of her being suffered a far more acute starvation for many, many months? Her womanhood was crying out for its rights.

As the end of the train was lost to sight, she turned away. She was just the girl he had left behind him, forlorn and desolate. A soldier's wife, who was crying healthily, almost tripped Margaret up as she swung quickly round. Her baby, a tired little fractious creature, was in her arms.

As Margaret apologized to her, the idea came to her to ask the woman where the men in the train were going to.

"Most of them to the Front," the woman said. "I lost my only brother two months ago, and now my man's gone. Oh, this is a cruel war!" Her sobs became heavier. "When my brother went to France, I thought it was a grand thing —I was awfully proud. It's a different thing now." She looked at Margaret keenly. "Has someone you care for gone to the Front? Is he in yon train?" She indicated the vanishing train.

Margaret's eyes answered. The woman saw that she was making an effort to keep calm.

"But he's not leaving his little ones behind him—ye'll no be married? I've got two at home to keep."

"You have his children—I have nothing," Margaret said enviously.

The woman burst into fresh weeping. Margaret envied her abandonment.

"They are a comfort," she said, "in a way. But they're a deal of trouble and anxiety—ye're well off without them."

The woman looked poor and clean. Half a crown left Margaret's purse and took its place beside the coppers which lay in the woman's. It seemed to her horribly vulgar and insulting to offer the woman money as a form of comfort, but her knowledge of the very poor told her that on a cold northern night the feeling that an extra half-crown had been added to her income would help. It would "keep the home-fire burning" for a week or so, at least.

With quick feet Margaret retraced her steps to the free-refreshment-room. Her selfish absence from her post pricked her conscience. When she entered it she saw that it was almost empty. One man was lying stretched out at full length on a seat; a pillow was under his head and he was fast asleep. He had lost his "connection" and would not be able to get a train until after midnight. He was safe from temptation in the hospitable room. Another man was writing letters at the big table; he had already addressed half a dozen post-cards.

Margaret knew that in this quiet interval her aunt would be busy washing up and drying the dirty cups at the wash-basin in the inner ladies' room. She hurried to join her.

"Have I been very long?" she said. "I do feel so selfish."

"No, no, my dear," her aunt said quickly. "I managed quite well—the rush had ceased." She looked at her niece questioningly. "I suppose you recognized a friend?"

"I saw a man, aunt, amongst the soldiers, whom I knew very well in Egypt. He was Freddy's best friend. I

haven't seen him since. I wonder if he knows that Freddy is dead? I wanted to speak to him if I could."

"And did you?"

"No." Margaret's voice trembled. "He had got into the train. The men were packed like sardines, and I couldn't find him. It left punctually to the minute—I hadn't much time to look."

Her aunt noticed the emotion in Margaret's voice. The woman in her longed to put a motherly arm round the girl as she stood beside her, but her training and national reserve prevented it. So instead of letting her niece see how generous her sympathy was, she said, in rather a strident voice, the result of her suppressed feeling:

"There is a good cup of coffee waiting for you in the small brown pot, and you'll find some egg sandwiches on a plate on the high shelf above the tumbler-cupboard. Go and eat them at once, before a fresh lot of men come in."

"Oh, I don't want anything," Margaret said pleadingly. "Let me help you wash all these cups, please do, aunt. I really don't want anything to eat."

"Whether you want it or not, I insist upon your eating it. Go now, at once, don't waste time."

Her niece obeyed meekly. When her aunt talked like that, and brought those tones into her voice, Margaret instantly lapsed back into her childhood. She was once more the little black sheep of Kingdom-come, the little black sheep who, at the death of her parents, had very quickly learned to fear rather than to love the various paternal relatives who had considered it their duty to bring her up in the way a Lampton should go.

If Margaret's aunt could only have brought herself to speak to her niece as she many times spoke to strangers of her, how different things might have been between them! But this God-fearing woman never did. She was too God-fearing and too little God-loving. She still clung tenaciously to the old order of things, to the method of rearing

girls and responding to human nature which had been considered wise in her young days.

While she dried the tea-cups, with a genuine feeling of sympathy for Margaret in her heart, for she was convinced that this man's going to the Front had upset her pretty niece, and while Margaret ate her sandwiches and drank her coffee because she had been bidden to do so, Michael's train was carrying him through the dark night. He was sitting in the corridor, on the top of his kit, lost in thought. He had missed his chance of getting a seat in any of the overcrowded carriages by his delay in the free-refreshment-room. But what did it matter? He was accustomed to discomfort, to unutterable hardships.

As he sat there, he heard and saw nothing of his surroundings, for Margaret's eyes and beauty had given him a delicious new world of his own. They had told him that she had always trusted him. They had obliterated the war, and the fact that he was journeying towards it. They had made his pulses throb again with the wine of passion and gay romance. He was an individual once more, enjoying the sweetness of the woman whose love had been so devoutly his.

It seemed so odd that the fresh, clean, proud-looking girl, with the dark hair and the crimson cross on her breast, behind the food counter, was actually the woman who had trembled in his arms under the desert stars, for her very fear of her love for him. She had once been very, very near to him; she had seemed an indispensable part of his life. To-night, standing behind the buffet, although she was materially quite close, she was hopelessly far away. His only privilege had been to take a cup of tea from her hands. A world of fresh experience and emotion had separated them.

For a long time he sat motionless on his kit, dreaming only of Margaret. Now it was of the wonderful things which her eyes had told him; now it was of the distance and circumstances which separated them. Later on he roused

himself out of his reverie, for the men in the carriage at whose open door he was sitting were singing, "It's a long, long way to Tipperary"—the song had not yet been depopularized by "Keep the home-fires burning"; it was still sung by soldiers and civilians and gramophones. The lusty, cheery voices brought Michael's mind back to the stern reality of war. He peeped out into the night, lifting up the blind from the window-pane and putting his head under it.

The cold, bleak day had given place to a starlit night, with a high-sailing moon. The snowcapped mountains and distant forests of solemn pine-trees looked serenely indifferent to the material affairs of mankind. Their purity and indifference wounded Michael. How could Nature remain so callously superior, so selfishly peaceful, while he was hurrying to France, to witness cruelties which it had taken the world all its great age to invent and put into action? These cold mountains, rushing streams and hidden glens would just go on smiling in the sunshine by day and sleeping peacefully under the moonlight, while golden youth was sacrificing itself on the altar of Liberty.

As the train rushed on through the darkness, emitting sparks which showed her pace, Michael's thoughts drifted to the old African in el-Azhar and all that he had visualized. As his eyes peered out from the jealously-covered windows and rested on the long line of mountains, high in their snowy whiteness, he repeated the old man's words:

"Why do the heathen so furiously rage together and the people imagine vain things in their hearts? I tell you, my son, it is because they have not the love of God in their hearts."

Yes, why, oh why, did they do it? The world he looked out upon was surely meant for grander and better things? It had nothing to do with bloodshed. And yet, even as he said it, words and voice answered back:

"Pray for fortitude, my son, that moral condition which enables us to meet danger and endure pain with calmness.

I tell you to pray for fortitude, for without it you cannot face the future."

As his thoughts were lost in this prayer, he got back his assurance that this war of wars had to be fought in the cause of freedom. He knew that it had to be won by the Allies, to ensure the triumph of right over might. This was the war which was to terminate all wars; the victory of the Allies was to bring about the disarmament of all powerful nations. It was the forerunner of a higher civilization.

He put his head between his hands and rested it on his knees. He knew that his words were true. And yet, had not his old friend in el-Azhar been as sincerely convinced that this war which he had visualized was to be fought for the triumph of Islam? Was he not certain that Allah had ordained it to prove to all countries upon the earth that the Christian nations had shown that their religion was hideous in Allah's sight, that it was a failure, that it had not redeemed mankind?

And Germany! What of Germany? Michael saw, with his vivid imagination and unprejudiced mind, German mothers and fathers praying for their sons who were fighting for the cause of the beloved Fatherland, the cause which they believed was the cause of righteousness. Did they also not pray earnestly and sincerely? Did they, too, not believe that God would be on the side of righteousness?

Why were these agonized parents and brave soldiers to be made to suffer if it was all to be in vain, if their cause was not the just cause? Had they not obeyed the cult of their land and the teachings of their spiritual pastors and masters?

He remembered the African's words: "The time draws near when each man will return to the land that gave him birth."

In this war which was raging, all the soldiers who suffered, and the parents who gave up their only-begotten sons to save their countries from extermination—all of them were the victims of circumstances. They were all heroes

answering to the call which demanded of them life's highest sacrifice. They were victims of militarism, which must be wiped out of civilization.

Michael became agonized with the hopelessness of answering the questions which stormed his brain. Over and over again he said to himself the words, "Why do the heathen so furiously rage together and the people imagine vain things in their hearts?" And over and over again the answer came, "I tell you, my son, it is because they have not the love of God in their hearts."

He repeated the words almost mechanically until they indefinitely became a sort of refrain which kept time to the thud, thud of the engine, and the rushing noise of the train.

At last, tired out both mentally and physically, he fell asleep. In his dreams Margaret was very near him. It was the old Margaret, radiant with the new wonder of love, fragrant with the night air of the Sahara which surrounded them.

The war and its demands were wiped out; the world was back again to the fair free days which knew neither hate nor fear.

## CHAPTER II

Nearly four months had passed and Margaret was still a pantry-maid in the same private hospital. The V.A.D. who was to have gone to France had suffered as great a disappointment as Margaret, for at the very last moment word had been sent to her—it had been unavoidably delayed—that her services in France would not yet be required. Margaret, with her bigness of nature, had insisted upon the girl retaining the post in the wards and letting things go on as they were. Her "bit" was very, very dull, but it was her "bit," and nothing she did, she knew, could in any

way compare in dullness to the lives of the boys in the trenches. So she worked and endured, and found the necessary change of scene in the mixed company of her garden-square society.

The days fled past. It was a dull life for a young girl, but since the war began all girls worthy of their country had said good-bye to the pleasures of youth. Youth had no time to be young; old age had forgotten that it was old. The renaissance of patriotism had transformed England. The war recognized neither old age nor youth; it opened its hungry jaws and took everyone in.

Margaret had neither seen nor heard anything of Michael since the eventful winter night when she had handed him a cup of coffee in the free-refreshment-room at the large northern station. She did not even know what regiment he was in. That, of course, was owing to her own stupidity; it was a matter of constant regret to her that she had not at the time had the forethought to ask the weeping woman on the platform what regiment her husband was in. Knowing nothing more than that Michael was at the Front, all she could do was to keep an eye on each day's casualty list in *The Times* newspaper. But even as her eyes hastily scanned the long columns of small print, she said to herself, "I need not look—his name will not be there. I have had my assurance of his safety."

She was certain now that the mystic message, which lay locked away in the dispatch-box which held her most important papers, had been sent to her to help her. It had been given to her to lessen her loneliness and to ease her anxiety.

Of course, this state of certainty had its feebler moments, and many, many times as she did her day's work she became affected by the waves of pessimism which spread at intervals over the British Isles. At these times she went about the pantry chalk-faced and tragic-eyed; but generally, when her suffering was becoming more than she could endure, from visualizing Michael blind, or limbless, or, still

worse, an imbecile through shell-shock, a clear voice would speak to her, her super-self would repeat the contents of her treasured message.

The fact that her hand had written the message before and not after Michael's going to the Front established her confidence in it. If it had been after, her sound judgment told her that suggestion might have had something to do with the automatic writing.

It was early spring, and Margaret's country-loving nature cried out for the smell of damp fields, for the scents and sounds of untrodden paths. The long twilight evenings seemed the loneliest hours to her in London. Their beauty was wasted. But the real country was denied her, for what distance could her two-hours-off take her from London? Scarcely beyond soot-blackened trees and the prim avenues of suburban respectability. But she had one great pleasure to look forward to—the Iretons were to be in London for the season, or, rather, what used to be termed the season in London.

They were to arrive in Clarges Street that very night. They were coming to England to help in the arrangements for the better equipping of native military hospitals in Egypt. Hadassah's knowledge of the native's likes and dislikes was considerable.

Margaret was now on her way to a tube railway-station. The afternoon was so glorious that she was going to make an excursion to Kew. She would just have time to look at the maythorns and hurry back. The one brave laburnum which gave brightness and fragrance to her garden-square told her that in the larger open spaces the flowering shrubs would be at their best.

As she ran down the steps of the tube station, she saw that a train which would take her to Hammersmith, where she would have to change for Kew Gardens, was drawn up at the platform; the passengers who were leaving it were trying to ascend the stairs. With youthful lightness she leapt down the last two or three steps and sprang across the plat-

form. She only just had time to step into the train before the iron gate closed behind her.

A little breathless with excitement and greatly pleased that she had succeeded in catching the train, she obeyed the order of the officious guard to "Step along—don't block the gangway!"

The carriage was not full, but there were not many empty seats in it, so Margaret hastily sank into the one which was nearest to her and close to the door. It happened to be next to one on which a soldier was seated. His kit was lying at his feet in front of him. As she sat down, a voice said quietly:

"I'd advise you to sit a little further off—I'm not very nice."

Margaret never grasped the meaning of the words; the voice was all she heard. It made her heart bound, and her senses reel; her bewilderment was overwhelming.

Some instinct made the soldier swing right round; he had been sitting with his broad back turned to the vacant seat, which Margaret still occupied. They faced each other; the soldier was Michael.

Under his ardent gaze Margaret paled pitifully and made a valiant effort to speak, to collect her thoughts. All that came from her trembling lips were the prosaic words, rather timidly spoken:

"Is it you, Michael?"

They seemed to content Michael and tell him a thousand things which dazed and intoxicated him. His surprise was even greater than Margaret's.

"Yes, it is me, Meg," he said. "Thank God we've met!"

For Margaret, in one moment all the long months of doubt and pride were wiped out. Michael's eyes had banished them. Her characteristic courage and her self-possession returned. She put her hand on the top of Michael's, the one which held his rifle. Her touch thrilled the soldier home from the Front; it travelled through his veins

like an electric current. Margaret's eyes had dropped; now they met her lover's again.

The train in its narrow channel under the city was making such a noise that it was impossible to hear even a loud voice above its hideous rattle. There are few noises more devastating to conversation than the awful roar of a London tube-railway. But Love speaks with an eloquence which no noise can drown; its sympathy and passion carry it far above the din and noise of battle. Margaret and Michael knew it well. If Love depended upon words, what a poor cold thing it would be! No quarrels would ever be settled, no journeys end in lovers' meetings.

Michael moved the hand which Margaret clasped. It was hard to do it, but he felt compelled to.

"I'm horribly verminous," he said, apologetically. "I'm just back from the trenches—you ought to keep further off."

Margaret's eyes dropped; a flame of love's shyness spread over her glowing face. It heightened her beauty and bewildered Michael. He longed to take her in his arms and kiss her—even before the whole carriage-full of people. Perhaps in the early days of the war the scene would only have brought tears and tender smiles to worldly eyes.

Margaret tried to say something, she scarcely knew what—just anything to break the passion of their silence, but the roaring of the train drowned her trembling question. How she hated the swaying and groaning and the rattling of the tube train as it dashed through its confined way! Never before had it seemed so awful, so maddening.

Michael, too, was tongue-tied. How could he offer Margaret any explanation, or ask if she had understood, while the train drowned the loudest voices? What a hideous place for a lovers' meeting, after months of weary longing!

When the train drew up at Knightsbridge Margaret rose from her seat. Her desire to see Kew had fled. It mattered little now where she went; she was only conscious of the

fact that she must put an end to the present strain. If Michael was as anxious to speak to her as she was to speak to him, he would follow her. He was obviously home on leave. He was a free man.

As she rose from her seat, Michael hurriedly gathered his kit together and rose also, and pushed his way through the crowd of passengers who were disgorging from the train. Whatever happened, he must keep her in sight; her obviously unpremeditated leaving of the train left him in doubt as to her feelings towards him.

He was on leave, he was in "Blighty," and Margaret was only a few steps ahead. He would risk anything rather than let her disappear and be lost once more.

When Margaret reached the platform, she turned round. She wondered if Michael had left the train. He was standing by her side. She laughed delightedly, a girl's healthy laugh, and gave a breathless gasp.

"May I?" he said. "I have risked annoying you."

"Annoying me!" Margaret's eyes banished the idea; they carried him off his feet. He was a soldier, home from the war; she was a girl, fresh and sweet. She laid her hand on his arm. "I'm not angry, Michael—I never was angry. Besides, you're . . . you're . . ." she hesitated. "You're a Tommy," she said, "and I love every one of them."

Michael knew that her shyness made her link him with the men who were fighting for their country. Even with the fondest lovers, there is a nervous shyness between them for the first moments of meeting after a prolonged separation. Margaret had moved closer to his side. His passion drew her to him; it was like the current of a magnet.

"You mustn't stand so close," he said, laughingly. "I'm horribly verminous—really I am!"

"As if I cared, Mike!" Margaret's words poured from her lips. Ordinary as they were, they were a love-lyric to his ears.

"May I come with you?" he asked. "Where were you going to? I've so much to say, so much to ask you!"

"I was going to Kew," she said, blushingly. "But I changed my mind."

Their eyes laughed as they met; he knew why she had changed her plans.

As they went up the station steps together, they were separated by a number of people who were hurrying to catch the next train. When they reached the open street, Michael made a signal to the driver of a taxi-cab who was touting for passengers. He instantly drew up, jumped from his seat and opened the door. Michael stood beside him, while Margaret, obeying his eyes, stepped into the cab. She asked herself no questions; she was only conscious of Michael's air of protection and possession. After her lonely life in London, it almost made her cry. It was the most delicious feeling she had ever experienced. She gave herself up to it.

In Michael's presence her pride and dignity and wounded womanhood were swept away. Even Freddy, in his soldier's grave, was forgotten. Her whole life and world was Michael; he began it and ended it. This verminous and roughly-dressed Tommy, who was gazing at her with eyes which bewildered and humbled her, was the dearest thing on earth.

She was comfortably seated; Michael had shut the door, and they were side by side, waiting for the taxi to go on. The next moment the driver popped his head in at the window.

"Where to, sir?" he said, politely. Michael's worn, weatherbeaten face had called up his sentiment for the men at the front.

"Where to?" Michael repeated foolishly. He paused. "Oh, anywhere! Anywhere will do—it doesn't matter." He smiled. "I'm back in old Blighty—that's all that matters—anywhere is good enough for me."

"Right you are, sir! I'll take you somewhere pleasant."

Margaret smiled. She was, indeed, all smiles and heartbeats and nervous anticipation.

The moment the taxi had swung away from the station, it entered a quiet street, bordered with high houses on either side. Michael lost no time; he folded her in his arms and kissed her again and again, and held her to him.

"This is heaven, just heaven, darling!" he said ardently. "I could eat you all up, you're so fresh and sweet and delicious!"

Meg was unresisting. Her yielding told her lover more than hours of explanation could have done. All she said was:

"But what if I don't think it's heaven?"

"What indeed?" he said, happily. "But don't you?" He had released her to read her answer in her eyes.

She said nothing; words seemed for lighter moments.

"Say something nice," he pleaded.

"I love you, Mike," she said shyly. "Is that enough?"

"It's all I want," he said, while Meg wound her arms round his neck and drew his face nearer hers to receive her kiss. As she nestled against him, he said tenderly, "Remember, I'm verminous; I'm not fit to touch, dearest."

"I don't care! I don't mind if I get covered with them," she laughed. "And I don't care if all the world sees me kissing you! I just love you, Mike, and you're here—nothing in all the world matters except that!"

She unclasped her hands. Her weeping face was pressed to his rough uniform; horrible as it was, she was kissing it tenderly, almost devoutly, stroking it with her fingers. It gave her a sense of pride and assurance that he was there beside her.

In the beautiful way known to love and youth, the foolish things they said and left unsaid told them whispers of the wonderful things which were to be. Michael was too exacting in his demands to allow of sustained conversation; sentences lost themselves in "one more kiss," or in one more bewildering meeting of happy eyes.

At last Michael said—not without a feeling of nervousness, for he had asked few questions, and the scraps of

information which Margaret had volunteered he had so often interrupted by his own impetuous demands, that she had accepted the fact that all explanations and questioning must wait until the excitement of their meeting had abated—"Why did Freddy not answer my letters? Why did you leave Egypt without one word?"

His voice expressed the fact that his letters had contained the full explanation of his conduct. It also said, "Why this forgiveness, if you were so unkind?"

It brought a strange revelation to Margaret of the ravages of war, of the changes which it had made in their lives. She remained lost in thought.

"Will Freddy consent? Will he understand, as you do?"

Margaret shivered. Her hand left Michael's; her fingers touched the band of crêpe which she was wearing on her uniform coat-sleeve.

"No, no, Meg!" he cried. "Not Freddy! Anybody but Freddy!" His words were a cry of horror, of anguish. In the surprise and excitement of their meeting, he had forgotten to ask for Freddy. Even though he was in his soldier's uniform, his happiness had obliterated the war. He had the true soldier's temperament—a fighter while fighting had to be done, a lover of pleasure in peace-time.

"Yes," she said, "Freddy. He was only in Flanders a few weeks."

Michael put his arms round her tenderly, protectingly. "You poor little girl, you brave little woman!"

Margaret loved his anguish, his complete understanding of the fact that of all people it was Freddy who should have been spared.

"If you had only seen him, Mike! He was so young, so fair. And he never had a chance."

Michael's eyes questioned her words.

"He was just sniped at the very beginning. That was the hardest part of it—to know that all his talents and intellect had been wasted!"

Michael held her closer. "Not wasted, dearest, don't say that."

"I didn't exactly mean wasted. But he could have done such great things for the world; he could surely have been given work more worthy of his abilities!"

"He is doing wonderful things now, Meg, he's hard at work. Freddy just got his promotion—look at it that way." He kissed her trembling lips; tears were flooding her glorious eyes.

"That's what Hadassah says."

"Hadassah?"

"Yes, Hadassah." Margaret sighed. "Oh, Michael, we have so much to talk about—whatever shall we do?" She laughed tearfully. Telling Michael about Freddy's death had brought back the anguish of the year which had separated them. "You can't imagine how kind and sweet she has been to me, and how hard they both tried to find you!" She paused. "Freddy tried, too—he was the best and dearest brother, Mike."

"I know it," he said; his words were a groan. He was trying to grasp the truth of Margaret's news. Nothing which he had seen in the war brought its waste and sacrifice more vividly before his eyes than the fact that Freddy was dead, the living, vital Freddy, the energetic, brilliant Freddy, whom he always visualized picking up the gleaming gems in the vast Egyptian tomb; he saw the scene with painful clearness.

There was a little silence. Margaret's hands were clasped tightly in the sunburnt hands of her "Tommy." Freddy was in both their minds, and the life they had shared with him in the Valley—the sense of order and method and ardour for work which he had instilled into their days.

Margaret was resting against Michael, as open about her love for him as any 'Arriet. She could think of Freddy without any feeling of guilt or even doubt of his approval. The things which come from within cannot be explained by forces from without. It was not what Michael had done

or had said which had banished her pride and told her of his faithfulness. It was the consciousness which came from within, the consciousness which had always fought back the forces from without. She had not felt one qualm of conscience, for Freddy was understanding and approving. He would know that any doubt she had ever had had been banished the moment Michael had taken her in his arms. Freddy, who had only blamed him for his weakness, would realize that even in that he had misjudged him. If Michael had had any guilt on his conscience, he would never have behaved as he had done. He had read in her eyes that her love for himself was unchanged, and knowing himself to be worthy of her love, he had not stopped to consider smaller things. She was so thankful that he had taken the bull by the horns.

. . . . . .

And now they were thinking of less bewildering things than their own love for each other. Michael was tenderly dreaming of Freddy. Margaret was reviewing Freddy's true attitude towards Michael in her mind. It was true that he had said that until he gave some satisfactory explanation of his behaviour, she was not to treat him as her lover. Well, her finer senses told her that Michael had given her a satisfactory explanation, and she was certain that Freddy also knew it. He had, by his taking her in his arms without one word of pleading or explanation, given her the fairest and most perfect assurance of his faithfulness to her and of his right to ask for her love.

These thoughts passed rapidly through her mind, while she silently enjoyed the delight of feeling Michael's close presence by her side. Never, even in Egypt, under the high-sailing moon in the great Sahara, had she loved him as romantically as she did at this moment. As a weather-stained, wind-tanned Tommy he was dearer to her than ever he had been in the days when, as a painter and an Egyptologist, he had opened her eyes to a new world of intellectual enjoyment.

Michael's mind was obsessed by Freddy's death. He had never for one moment imagined that such a thing was in the least likely to happen. He did not know that Freddy was at the Front; he had imagined to himself that such exceptional brains and unusual qualities would have been given other work to do, than to stand all day long knee-deep in mud in the trenches of Flanders. His heart ached for Margaret. Her devotion to Freddy was exceptional; her pride in him had been the keynote of her existence. He spoke abruptly, while his hands clasped hers hungrily and tightly.

"Would Freddy mind?" he said. "I can't be disloyal to him!"

"Mind?" Meg said questioningly. "Mind my loving you? He knew my love could never change—it was born in unchanging Egypt."

"Yes, mind if you married me while I'm on leave?—I've got a whole fortnight, and my commission."

"Oh!" Meg said breathlessly. "You go at such a pace!"

Michael laughed boyishly at her astonishment. Her woman's mind had not thought of marriage; it was satisfied with the present conditions.

"I don't think Freddy would mind—not now. But"—her laugh joined Michael's—"you see, you haven't asked if I'd mind. We aren't even engaged—you wouldn't be. Do you remember?"

Michael pulled round her head with his hands, and kissed her lips. "I don't care if the whole world sees," he said, quoting her words. "Don't pull away your head—I'm just 'a bloomin' Tommy' back in Blighty with his girl."

Meg resigned herself to his kisses. "All London's doing it," she said breathlessly. "You'll see fathers and sons, and mothers and sons, and lovers walking arm in arm, in the West End even. Their time together is too short and precious to think of stupid conventions. The national reserve of the English nation is swept away."

While Margaret was speaking, she was thinking and

thinking. Could she marry him before he returned to the Front? It was all so sudden. But why not? War had taught women to take what happiness they could get in their two hands, not to let it slip. Michael made her thoughts more definite.

"Did Freddy trust me?" he asked.

Meg's eyes dropped; her heart beat painfully.

"He didn't," Michael said. "Don't pain yourself, dearest, by answering. He'll understand better now—everything will be made clear."

"Don't blame him, Mike!"

"I'm not blaming him—I'd have done the same. It sounded beastly, the whole story. Hang Millicent Mervill!"

Margaret proceeded to tell him in broken sentences that she had seen Millicent in Cairo, and related something of what she had told her and how, after that, she had kept the promise which she had made to Freddy, to go back to England if she heard from either Michael himself or from Millicent that they had been together in the desert.

"And you heard that she was in my camp?"

"Yes—Millicent took care that I heard that, and . . ." she paused.

Michael looked into her eyes. "And you went back to England?"

"Yes, I kept my promise." Her eyes told him that she had kept it because her honour demanded it, not because she believed all that Millicent had told her.

"And, knowing her story, you didn't condemn me, you still believed in me and loved me?" His eyes thanked her.

Margaret returned his steadfast gaze. "Yes, it was not hard to trust you, Mike. I remembered our promise to help and trust one another. What are promises and vows made for if they are not to be kept when they are put to the test? We did not make ours lightly—I told you I should understand."

"Dearest, how beautiful your love is! To-day you welcomed me without one shadow of reproach! Had I not

read in your eyes all that I did, I should not have dared to follow you when you left the train."

"Would you have taken me in your arms if you had been guilty, if Millicent had told the truth?" The words conveyed a world of meaning to Michael. "I have often grumbled, Mike—I have thought that you might have let me hear the story from your own lips, or by letter. I know that in his heart Freddy always thought you were only to be blamed for allowing her to stay in your camp—I know he never really believed that you had arranged the meeting, or that you were her lover."

Michael grasped her two hands in his, tightly. "I never was, Meg, I never was! I hated her for coming, I tried to get rid of her."

"I knew it, Mike—deep, deep down I knew it. But it hurt." She leaned against him. "Oh, how it hurt, dearest! And you never wrote or explained—that was what I found hardest to bear. I suppose you were so certain that I trusted you that you never thought about what others might say; but love makes us exacting, jealous, and you might have written, dearest! Then Freddy would have known. How could I make him understand all that my heart knew? How can one make others see the things which come from within?"

Michael put his arms round her. "My darling," he said, "I did write, I wrote often. I wrote directly Millicent appeared in the desert; I wrote again before I was ill. You know how many letters go astray—you know how many were intercepted by German spies before the war broke out."

"You were ill?" Meg started. "I knew you were, I told Freddy you were ill. But Millicent spoke as if you were in such perfect health that I had to abandon the conviction." Her voice was an apology.

"I was so ill with fever," Michael said, "that I wasn't able to write, and the faithful Abdul couldn't. Like many Arabs, he can speak a smattering, and a very fair one, of

three or four languages, but he can't write a line in any one of them. As soon as I was strong enough to travel I went back to the Valley."

"Oh, did you?" He felt Margaret tremble as she said the words.

"I went back to find our Eden a barren desert, Meg, no sign of either Freddy or you in it. It was horrible. I started off to Cairo in hopes of learning from the Iretons where you had gone to, to discover what you had heard of Millicent." His pressure of Meg's hands explained the full meaning of his words. "But they had left Cairo—it was very hot—so I returned to England by way of Italy. In Naples I had a slight relapse—I had to wait there for some time, until I was able to continue my journey. I only arrived in London the day before war was declared. Of course I volunteered at once—I was glad to do it. Life seemed empty of all its former sweetness. I don't think I cared what happened to me; and I did care what happened to England and Belgium. I was at last going to fight in the great fight against absolute monarchy and militarism!"

When Michael had finished his short account of his doings, which merely touched on essentials, they realized that they were in Hyde Park. Margaret's eyes had caught sight of a clock over the gateway as they entered; she had noticed how her two hours were flying, even while her conscious self was enthralled with her lover's story. Spring was in the year; it was in the hearts of the united lovers. Love smiled to them from the budding shrubs and from the daffodils swaying in the breeze.

To Michael "Blighty" was the most beautiful land in the world. His heart was so burdened with happiness that Margaret had to laugh at his high spirits and absurd remarks. He was the old enthusiastic Mike, delighting in life and embracing it rapturously.

In the midst of this intoxication of happiness, Margaret's sense of duty and responsibility, her Lampton characteristics, urged her. The clock over the archway had

subconsciously reminded her that she was, after all, a pantry-maid in a hospital full of wounded soldiers; that the soldier by her side was a part and portion of the great war; that war, not love, ruled the world; this interlude had been stolen from the God of Battles.

"Time's flying, dearest," she said. "I've less than one more hour. Let's drive to a little garden-square close to my hospital—we can dismiss the taxi there and talk until I have to go in—that's to say, if you are free to come."

"Are you nursing?" he said. His eyes looked questioningly at her blue uniform.

"No, not yet—I'm a pantry-maid."

"A what?" he said, laughingly. "You're a darling!"

"I wash up tea-cups and saucers which Tommies drink from, and lay out trays with tea-cups and saucers all day long." She paused. "That's as near as I've got to the war."

"With your brains, Meg—is that all they could find for you to do?" His encircling arm hugged her closely. Each moment she was becoming more desirable and beautiful in his eyes; each moment life in the trenches seemed further and further away.

"Freddy was sniped," Margaret said, "before he even killed a German. Washing up dirty cups makes me mind it less."

"You dear darling," Michael said. "I understand and Freddy knows."

"I'll tell the man where to drive to," Margaret said bravely. "Then we can be together until I have to begin work." She raised the speaking-tube to her lips and told the driver where to go, explaining the most direct way to the secluded square.

When she dropped the tube and sank back into her seat Michael's arm was round her; she had felt his eyes and their passion, gazing at her while she instructed the driver.

"Will you marry me the day after to-morrow?" he said. "I'll get a special license. Let's start this little time of perfect happiness at once, Meg—it may never come again."

Meg laughed nervously, but there was gladness in the sound of her voice. "But, Mike, it's so sudden—the day after to-morrow!"

"So was our love, darling—don't you remember?" He paused. "Am I asking too much? You might be my wife for less than two weeks, beloved, remember that."

They looked into each other's eyes. Meg knew the meaning of his words; he was a Tommy on leave.

"I can't go on having hairbreadth escapes to the end of the war," he said. "Up to now I'm the mascot amongst the boys; I've had prodigious luck."

Meg remained silent. Her heart was beating. His hairbreadth escapes—what were they due to? She saw her vision of him in her London bedroom, surrounded by the rays of Aton. She nursed the knowledge of it in her heart—she dared not tell him.

"Over and over again, Meg, the most extraordinary things have happened. I can't tell you them all now—they would sound like exaggerations, but I'm almost beginning to agree with the boys that I've a charmed life."

Meg longed to confide her secret to him, but something held her back; something said to her that he was not meant to know it, that if he knew he might be tempted to do still more foolhardy deeds, he would feel compelled to put her mystical message to the test. She remained silent; her mind was working too quickly for speech. She had forgotten that Michael wanted her answer. Her heart had given it so willingly that words were scarcely needed, but he pressed her for her consent. There are some words which lovers like to hear spoken by beautiful lips.

"You are the mistress of my happiness," he urged. "And if our happiness in this world is to be condensed into twelve days, surely it would be worth while seizing it and being thankful for it? In this world of agony and death,

twelve days of life at its fullest is of more account than a long lifetime of unrecognized benefits and indefinite happiness."

Meg agreed that the war had taught people to be thankful for what seemed to her pitifully small mercies; people married for ten days or for a fortnight at the longest, knowing that for that little time of forgetfulness their husbands were among the quick; at the end of it they might be among the dead.

"Then, if I can get a special license to-morrow, will you marry me the day after? If I may go back to the Front as your husband, Meg, I think I can win the war. My life will be more charmed than ever." He laughed gaily. "What will the boys say? I'm the only one in the trench who doesn't write to about six girls every day, telling each one that she is the only girl he loves."

Margaret's answer was in her laugh, which was all love, and in the lips she held up to meet Michael's kiss. "And it's proud I'll be to be Mrs. Amory!" she said. "And ye can tell the boys that, if you like." She broke off suddenly from her mock Irish tones, and said more gravely, "Isn't it wonderful? Only an hour ago I was alone in London, so lonely that the very flowers hurt me! I hated the spring in the year—it laughed at my dull room and humdrum existence. And now——"

"And now," he said, "you are going to be a soldier's wife, you are going to marry a verminous Tommy in two days' time, you darling!"

Meg looked at her own dark uniform. "I don't see even one," she said, "but I'll have to be careful. I'll change when I go in. Are you really as bad as that?"

"I tried to clean myself up a bit," he said. "But I have been awful. That's the thing I hate most about the whole business. I've got used to all the other discomforts long ago, and to everything else."

"Even to the killing of human beings, Mike?"

"Yes," he said. "Even to the killing of brave men. I

know what you're saying to yourself—I thought that too, I thought it would send me mad, I longed to kill myself to get out of it. But, in an attack, when you've seen your own jolly pals, who have lived in the trenches with you, bleeding and tattered, spatchcocked against barbed wire, and had to leave them sticking to it, their eyes haunt you, your blood gets up, you long for a hundred hands to shoot with, instead of only two. When you've seen the result of Prussian militarism on decent German soldiers, you know that it's your duty to destroy it, to give the German people, as well as the rest of the world, their freedom and rights."

"If only we could get at the Prussian military power, and spare the wretched soldiers—they are all sons and husbands, and somebody's darlings," Meg said pathetically.

"But we can't. It's their punishment, perhaps, poor devils, for having submitted to such an arrogant, absolute monarchy. To get at the rulers we have to slaughter the innocent. It sounds all wrong, but I know it's the only way."

"I suppose so," Margaret said. "But it does seem hard, just because they have been law-abiding, industrious, obedient subjects, they are to be slaughtered like sheep and made to do all sorts of cruel acts which will brand them for ever as barbarians in the eyes of the world. There must be thousands and thousands of them who are decent men."

"There is a saying that every country has the Government it deserves. They have got theirs. A German Liberal has written these words to-day, or something like them. He says, 'Peace and war are, after all, not so much the result of foreign policy (strange though it may appear) as the inevitable consequences of the inward constitution of the State. "International anarchy" is not a thing apart, but only the natural consequence of feudal military institutions. Hence away with these institutions.' "

"But will they ever away with them in Germany?"

"Not unless we, the Allies, crush the feudal military con-

stitution; not until the people realize that their submission has brought this war upon themselves."

"But surely up to now we have admired law-abiding, uncomplaining peoples?"

"I haven't," Michael laughed. "You know I haven't."

"Oh no, you haven't! But then you're a firebrand, always 'agin the Government.' "

"I always walked on my head." He hugged her as he spoke. "I'm doing it to-day, darling."

"Poor old Freddy!" Margaret said. "If he could only hear us now, he'd think I was anti-war, and you were pro-war." She sighed. "If he could only see you in a Tommy's uniform, defending the morality of taking human lives!"

"*Qui sait*, Meg? He probably sees far more of it than you or I do. Don't you make any mistake about that. He knows that I'm fighting in the war because I'm anti-war, with a vengeance. If this war isn't won by the Allies, Meg, there will be no end to war. It will never cease; it will burst out at intervals until the Kaiser's Alexandrian and Napoleonic dream is accomplished. If he wins this war, he'll turn his eyes in other directions, for new worlds to conquer. With Europe subdued, there is Egypt, India, America. Lamartine said, 'It is not the country, but liberty, that is most imperilled by war.' "

"What did he mean?" Margaret asked.

" 'That every victorious war means for the victorious nation a loss of political liberty, whilst for the vanquished it is a foundation of inspiration and democratic progress.' "[1]

"Oh, Mike, and if we win? I mean, when we win?"

"As our cause is the cause of right over might, ours is not a war of aggression or annexation. He was speaking of an aggressive war."

"Who was speaking?"

"Well, I was voicing Hermann Fernau, the brave Liberal

[1]Hermann Fernau: *The Coming Democracy.*

who is exiled from the Fatherland. I can't give you his exact words, but he says something like this in his wonderful book, *Germany and Democracy:* 'For what would happen if we Germans emerged victorious from this war? Our victory would only mean a strengthening of the dynastic principle of arbitrary power all along the line. Those of us who bewail the political backwardness of our Fatherland must realize that a German victory would prolong this backward condition for centuries. And not only Germany, but the whole of Europe, would have to suffer the consequences.' "

"Fancy a German saying that!"

"There are some sane Germans left, darling. Fernau belongs to the small band of German Liberals who have been driven from their country."

The taxi had reached the garden-square. They got out and Michael prodigally overpaid the driver. The man took the money.

"I'd have driven you for nothing, sir," he said delightedly, "if the car was my own. I was young once, and so was the missus." He saluted respectfully.

As they turned into the quiet little garden, Michael said happily, "Why, Meg, what a dear little bit of France! How did you discover it?"

"My hospital's just across the square, and so is my bedroom. This is my sitting-room."

They found a quiet seat amongst the tombstones and sat down, a typical resort for a Tommy and his sweetheart. When they had been seated for a few moments, Michael said:

"It's a far cry to the Valley, and the little wooden hut, and the tombs of the Pharaohs, Meg."

Meg's eyes swept the garden-square; the laburnum-tree was shedding flakes of gold from its long tassels; they were falling like yellow rain in the spring breeze.

"Very, very far," she said as her eyes pointed to the smoke-begrimed tombstones. "Here the homes of the dead

seem so forsaken, so humble. Death has triumphed. In the Valley the dead were the eternal citizens, their homes were immortal. The dead have no abiding cities here, and even the palaces of the living will be crumbled into powder before Egypt's tombs show any signs of wear and decay."

Their thoughts having turned to Egypt, beautiful memories were recalled. Often broken sentences spoke volumes. Their time was very short, so short that Love devised a sort of shorthand conversation, which saved a thousand words.

And so for the rest of Margaret's precious hour they talked and dreamed and loved. There was so much to explain and so much to tell on both sides that, as Margaret laughingly said, they would both still be trying to get through their "bit" when Michael would have to leave for the Front.

Margaret just left herself time to hurry upstairs and change her uniform in her lodgings before she returned to the hospital. Michael waited for her in the square.

Before they left it, Margaret said, "I want you to shake hands with an old friend of mine. We'll have to pass her seat; she is always here. She's a great character, an old actress—such a good sort."

As they passed the shabby little woman, picking down old uniforms, Meg stopped. The woman looked up; her eyes brightened. The V.A.D. had a soldier with her—her lover, she could see that at a glance. He had brought an atmosphere of romance and passion into the laburnum-lit garden.

Margaret introduced Michael, who was perfectly at his ease on such an occasion.

"My friend has arrived from the Front," she said. "We are going to be married the day after to-morrow . . ." she paused, " . . . that is to say, if I can get leave from my hospital for a week."

The woman looked up at the handsome couple. "Well, what a surprise!" she said, as she stared hard at Michael. "Who would ever have thought that you were going to be

married so soon? You never even told me you were engaged! You were very sly." She smiled happily.

Margaret laughed at her astonished expression. "I mustn't stop to tell you about it now," she said. "My time is up—I ought to be back in ten minutes to my cups and saucers. I just wanted you to shake hands with the man I'm going to marry."

The woman rose from her seat. As she did so, the old scarlet coat which she had been unpicking fell to her feet. She glanced at her hands, as much as to say, "They aren't very clean." Michael held out his, ignoring her hesitation, and gave her slender, artist's fingers a hearty shake and warm grasp.

The old actress's emotions were kindled; poverty had not dimmed the romance of her world.

"You'll do, sir," she said. "You'll do—you'll do for the sweetest and truest lady that lives in London town."

"We have your blessing, then?" he said gaily. "And you'll look after her when I'm at the Front—promise me that?"

"That I will, sir. But it's she who looks after me, and more than me." She cast her eyes round the strange neighbourhood. "Looks after us and helps us in a hundred different ways." But she was speaking to Michael's retreating figure, for Margaret and her lover had left her. As she watched his swinging strides, she murmured to herself, "He'll do for her—there's no mistaking his kind. He'll do for her." Her thoughts flew to familiar scenes. "There was something in his voice which reminded me of . . ." she recalled a celebrated actor. "He would make a fine Hamlet, a heavenborn Hamlet."

As they left the gardens Margaret said, "I have a feeling, Mike, that someone has been watching us ever since we came into the gardens—have you?"

"No," Michael said. "I hadn't any eyes or ears for anything but you."

Margaret smiled. "I felt it," she said, "rather than saw it. But, just this minute, didn't you see that dark figure?"

"No. Anyhow, let them watch—I don't care. Everybody's doing it." His arm was round her.

Meg laughed, but not so whole-heartedly, and when she was saying good-bye to him at the hospital, she said, nervously and anxiously, "There's that black figure again—she's just passed us. I saw her yesterday—she watched me go in after my hours off."

In spite of that fact, Margaret kissed her Tommy quite openly and flagrantly and in the broad daylight. She had promised to walk with him again on the next afternoon during her hours off, and to marry him the day after, if he got the license and she got her leave.

When they had parted she said to herself, "Ours will be a war-wedding with a vengeance! When I went out for my two hours this afternoon I was absolutely free, not even engaged. Now," she blushed beautifully, "I am the bride-elect of a Tommy home on leave for a fortnight!"

After her day's work was done, she tried to find the busy matron. When she found her, she went straight to the point—it was Margaret's way.

"I want to get married the day after to-morrow," she said. "Could you get someone to take my place? Can you let me go?"

"For good, do you mean?" The matron was scarcely surprised. These sudden marriages were all a part of her day's work, the flower and the passion of war.

Margaret's eyes brightened. "If you could get a temporary V.A.D., I think I'd like to come back when he's gone."

The older woman looked at her. "I think you'd better take a rest. You've been at this dull job for a long time now. Don't you think you would be better for it?"

"Perhaps you are right," Margaret said. "I really haven't had time to consider details—I'd only got as far as wanting the week while he is at home, to get married in."

"Take it, by all means," the matron said. "I've a good long waiting-list on my books of voluntary helpers to choose from." She paused. "I don't mean that it will be easy to replace you, Miss Lampton—I wish all my workers gave me as little trouble as you have done."

"Oh, but it's been such ordinary work! Anyone could have done it as well."

"I've not been a hospital nurse for twenty years, Miss Lampton, for nothing. You can comfort yourself with the fact that a good worker always makes herself felt in whatever capacity she is in. No sentiment or romance finds its way into an area-pantry, though there's plenty of it in the wards." She smiled. "But in spite of that, your romance seems to have progressed. I wish you every happiness and the best of luck."

Luck nowadays, Margaret knew, meant but one thing—the life of her husband. "Thank you," she said. "I've loved being of use. I've really been grateful for the work—it's been what I needed."

"I think I can get a V.A.D. to take your place to-morrow morning—you will want all your time. If you will look in at your usual hour, you will hear if we have got one. But take my advice, Miss Lampton," the matron said, as she turned to leave the astonished Margaret, "if you are going to nurse, go in for a thorough hospital training. You'd make a good nurse . . ." she paused, " . . . that is to say, if you are free to do it when your husband is at the Front. Anyhow, think it over. It seems to me a pity that you should be content to remain a V.A.D. when you may be wanted for much more serious work later on."

When she had said good-bye, Margaret fled to the telephone. She had so much to do and arrange that she had to go from one thing to another as fast as she could. She rang up the rooms in Clarges Street where she knew that Hadassah Ireton was going to stay. She ought to have arrived that afternoon. When at last she got on to the right

number, she was answered by the husband of the landlady, an ex-butler, and an admirable *maître de cuisine*.

"Has Mrs. Ireton arrived yet?" Margaret asked.

"Yes, she arrived at five o'clock. Who shall I say is speaking?"

"Ask her if she can speak to Miss Lampton, please, for a few minutes. Will you tell her that it is very urgent?"

The next minute Margaret heard Hadassah's voice.

"Hallo! Miss Lampton, is that you?"

"Yes," Margaret said. "But, please, not Miss Lampton!"

"Well, Margaret—I always think of you as Margaret. How nice of you to ring me up and welcome me to London!"

"Hadassah," Margaret said breathlessly; her heart was beating with her news; she spoke rather loudly, "I rang you up to tell you that I'm going to be married the day after to-morrow!"

Hadassah heard Margaret sigh even through the telephone. It was a sigh of pent-up emotion, an expression of relief.

Margaret waited. She knew that she had taken Hadassah so completely by surprise that she had no answer ready.

"Margaret!" she said at last, in amazement, "who to?"

Margaret detected, or fancied she did, a little coldness in her question. There was certainly not the pleased ring of congratulation which she had expected in her words.

"Why, to Michael Amory, of course! Who else could it be?" Margaret's happy laugh crackled in Hadassah's ears.

"Oh, my dear, I'm so glad! What a wonderful surprise! Is he in London? When did he turn up?"

"He has been to the Front—as a Tommy, but he's got his commission in the same regiment. I only met him to-day—he's just got back. I feel too bewildered to think; I scarcely know what I am saying."

"Is this the first time that you've seen him since you

parted in Egypt?" Hadassah's voice expressed both amusement and eager curiosity.

"Yes, to speak to. We met in the train. Some months ago I saw him at a railway-station in the North. He was passing through, and I was there, but we had no opportunity of speaking to each other." In the same breathless voice she said, "Freddy would approve. I know what you are thinking, but it's all right—he's as keen as Freddy about the war, and there never was anything wrong."

"I'm so awfully glad. You know I never doubted him."

"He arrived in England the day before war was declared by us. He tried to find me, but he couldn't, and so he just gave himself up to the war. He lost himself in it—you know his way! He thought that Freddy and I would approve. He was always worthy of me, Hadassah, but now I'm so proud of him. He would have joined up in any case, but he thought that in doing his bit he would atone for his weakness about Millicent. It was only his old method of letting things slide—he couldn't get rid of her, but he was absolutely loyal to me."

"I understand," Hadassah said. "But I admit that it was difficult for Freddy to look at it in that light."

"It's so hard to explain over the 'phone," Margaret said. "And indeed, it isn't what he has told me so much—it's just what he makes me feel."

"I know, dear. I feel it's all right—I always felt it was."

"He has been absolutely true, Hadassah. Freddy must know that now. And you know, I can afford to marry." Her voice lost its buoyancy.

"Yes, I know, dear. I saw your brother's will."

"And you approve, Hadassah? It seems a shame not to grasp this little bit of happiness." She paused, for above her practical words came the assurance of Michael's safety; the words of the message almost came to her lips.

"I quite approve. In these awful days, even a fortnight of happiness is a wonderful thing. Use your own judg-

ment, Margaret—it's been unerring so far. Take this joy right to your heart."

"Will you and your husband witness our marriage? I want to telegraph to Aunt Anna—may I say that I am being married from your house? We won't bother you—is it awful cheek asking you?"

"Why, my dear, of course you can come here to-morrow, as early as ever you like, and we'll go into all the details, and fix up everything quite nicely. With telephones and money and London at our backs, you will be astonished at what a nice little *déjeuner* we shall have ready for you." Hadassah laughed. "Money has its uses, my dear, in spite of all your Mike's oblivion of the fact."

"Oh, you are too kind! Won't it be nice—a little *déjeuner à quatre* in your rooms? Your husband is with you? I forgot to ask."

"Yes, he's here. He'll stand by your Michael. Now, all you've got to do is to look after your own concerns—get your things together and send them here. I'll have them packed for you and do all the rest."

"You angel!" Margaret said. "Oh, don't cut us off!" she cried to the girl at the exchange, for a buzzing sound filled her ears. "Are you there? Can you hear? I won't take much on my honeymoon," she said, but her words did not reach Hadassah; no answer came back to her. They had been cut off. She quickly put the receiver back on its hook and hurried off to do the next thing which suggested itself as being the most important—writing a short list of the things which she would have to buy the next day, and sending a telegram to her Aunt Anna.

## CHAPTER III

THE next day, when Margaret met Michael in the garden square, she was not in her V.A.D.'s uniform. She told him that she was now her own mistress, so much so that she had that morning almost completed the purchase of her trousseau, and that she was free to stay out as long as she liked.

"But I want you," she said, "to return with me now to Clarges Street, to the Iretons. They are in town, and Hadassah says we can be married from their rooms to-morrow."

"They are the kindest people in the world," he said. "I felt sure you were making friends with Hadassah while I was in the desert. I often comforted myself with the fact that she would understand the whole situation and help you."

"She's a brick!" Margaret said. "She has been your ardent champion all the time."

They signalled to a taxi-cab to drive them to Clarges Street. It was necessary to do everything as quickly as they could; there was no time for leisurely walking or discussion.

Suddenly Margaret said, "Look! Quick, Mike, there! I saw that black figure again. She was sitting in the gardens when I arrived. She never used to be here—I feel convinced that she is following us. I believe one of these taxis is waiting for her." Her eyes indicated two taxis, which were waiting outside the gardens.

"Why do you think so?" Michael said. "What can any human being want with us? Why should our movements be interesting to any one but our two selves?" He laughed. "By Jove, they are interesting to us, though, aren't they?" His eyes spoke of the morrow.

Margaret laughed, too. Michael's high spirits allowed her no time for reflection. He was carrying her off her feet

in his old magnetic way. If he had only beckoned, she would have followed him to the ends of the earth; wings would have carried her, the air would have borne her. The dull realities of her life in London had vanished as if they had never been. The black figure, which had stepped into a cab and followed them, was forgotten.

. . . . .

For something like half an hour Michael sat talking with Hadassah and Margaret. He had so much to tell them that he succeeded in telling them nothing connectedly or completely. He began a hundred different things and left most of them halfway through, to plunge headlong into another and entirely different subject. The things he wanted to say were tumbling over each other in his mind. The bewildering idea that he was going to be married the next day sent all his thoughts reeling.

Margaret was not the sort of girl to worry over a lot of superficial clothes for a ten days' honeymoon. What she needed she had got together in a couple of hours at Harrod's and one or two good shops in the West End.

They had made up their minds to spend their brief period of married life together at Glastonbury. It was not too far from London and Michael had once stayed in the historical old inn in that quiet city of Arthurian romance. In Egypt he had inspired Margaret with a desire to see Glastonbury in the spring time, when the maythorns were in bloom and the luscious meadows gay with flowers.

Like all soldiers, Michael was very silent upon the subject of his own personal experiences at the Front, although at intervals he would suddenly burst out with some dramatic incident in which he had taken part.

When Hadassah congratulated him on being offered a commission, he laughingly said, "Oh, I must accept it. It isn't fair to shirk it, though I'd rather remain as I am."

Margaret's heart stood still. She knew what he meant; she was not ignorant of the appalling death-rate of officers.

"You mean," Hadassah said, "that——"

She got no further, for Michael interrupted her. "I mean that if I'm capable of leading men I ought to do it, but I dread the responsibility. That's why I never tried for a commission—I didn't feel confident. But as the deaths amongst the officers are much greater than among the men, I can't remain a Tommy, can I?" He pulled his notebook out of his pocket. "Read that," he said. "That's the sort of thing that proves whether a man can lead or not."

Margaret and Hadassah read the newspaper cutting. It had been quoted from the *Petit Journal.*

"The British High Command relies more and more on the value of the individual soldier, and in this we see one of the main factors which will mean German defeat. Take the case of the heroism of a sergeant who, seeing his officer seriously wounded, himself assumed command of his company and led them victoriously to the third line. There he fell in his turn, but one of the men immediately took his place and completed the conquest of the objective. It is thanks to such acts that . . . has been seized, crossed and left behind."

When Hadassah and Margaret looked up, they met Michael's eyes. They were looking into the things beyond, things very far from Clarges Street.

"That was my sergeant," he said, "the finest fellow that ever wore shoe-leather!"

"And the Tommy," Hadassah said, "has he been promoted?"

Michael's eyes dropped; his tanned skin flushed slightly.

"Of course he'll have to take a commission if it's offered to him. He can't very well refuse. He has proved his ability to lead, poor chap! I expect he'd rather remain as he was. I know I would—it's a terrible responsibility, inspiring your men as well as teaching them, but one can't shelter oneself while others face greater risks."

Hadassah's quick brain read the truth, while Margaret merely lost herself in visualizing the dangers which Michael

would so soon have to face. The twelve days would be gone so soon that they were scarcely worth counting.

From the war their sketchy talk returned again to Michael's experiences in the desert. He told them briefly about the saint, omitting the nature of his illness. He spoke so naturally and unguardedly about Millicent, and of his annoyance at her appearance and at her persistence in remaining, that if there had been any lingering doubt in Hadassah's mind upon the subject of his absolute loyalty to Margaret, it was completely dispersed.

When he was hurriedly telling them about the meeting of the saint and all about his knowledge of the hidden treasure, and how completely it tallied with the African's prophecies, he produced a tiny parcel from his pocket-book. He handed it to Margaret, who felt as if she had been listening to the last chapter of a long story from *The Arabian Nights*.

The little packet was made up of many folds of tissue-paper. With nervous fingers Margaret unwrapped it.

When the last piece was discarded and she saw that uncut jewel lying against the palm of her hand, she gave a cry of delight mixed with apprehension. Its beauty was unique, its colour was indescribable as the crimson of an afterglow in the Valley.

She looked almost pitifully at Michael. She wished that the world was a little less strange; some of the humdrum of her pantry-maid's existence would be almost welcome.

"The saint carried it in his ear," he said. "He took it from Akhnaton's treasure."

"Have you had it with you at the Front all this time?" Hadassah said. Margaret's emotion touched her.

"Yes. But now it is for you, Meg. I will have it made into anything you like, so that you can always wear it. It will be my wedding-present, a jewel of Akhnaton."

"No, no!" Margaret said quickly. "You must take it, it belongs to you. You must always carry it about with

you, Mike—it is your talisman." She stopped, for Michael had closed her fingers over the stone.

"But I want you to have it," he said. "Let it be my wedding-gift—there is no time for the buying of presents."

"No," Margaret said. "Don't urge me, Mike. I shan't like it. Hadassah, don't you agree with me?—he must never part with it!" She smiled. "I should be terribly afraid if you did, I should think your luck had deserted you. Dearest, do take it—I believe Akhnaton meant you to keep it."

While she spoke she was longing to tell him of the hand which had written, of her message. The words almost passed her lips, but again she refrained, she obeyed her supersenses. She was convinced that Michael, when his blood was up, ran terrible risks, that he was reckless to the verge of folly. She had heard a letter read in the hospital which had been written to a mother about her son. His Colonel had said, "There are some men who will storm hell, there are others who will follow, and there are some who will lag behind. Your son belongs to the first of the three. What he needs to learn is caution and the value in this war of officers as able as himself." Margaret knew that Michael's rash nature needed no encouragement.

Hadassah championed Margaret. "I think you should keep it," she said to Michael, "and give it to Margaret after the war."

They all laughed, not unmirthfully, and yet not happily. "After the war!" they echoed in one voice. "Oh, that wonderful 'after'!"

"That promised land," Michael said. "Never mind—it's coming. The labour and travail of the war will bring forth Liberty. The pains of childbirth are soon forgotten—mothers know how soon, when the infant is at their breast."

Hadassah and Margaret looked at one another. Their eyes said many things; Margaret's were full of pride because Hadassah was hearing from his own lips that Mi-

chael was as whole-heartedly in the war as even Freddy could have desired.

She was still fingering and gazing at the wonderful stone. It seemed scarcely more strange to her that it had actually once belonged to the first king who had abhorred war, had once formed a part of his great royal treasury, than the fact that it had played its part in the mystical drama of her life in Egypt. As Michael talked, she questioned herself dreamily. Which was real—her humdrum pantry-maid existence in London, with her dreary walks through darkened streets, with now and then a Zeppelin scare to make her lonely bedroom seem more lonely? Or her life in the Valley, surrounded by the unearthly light of the Theban hills, her life of intellectual excitement and strange intimacy with things and people which the world had forgotten for thousands of years?

Michael felt her abstraction. He put his hand on the top of hers, which held the jewel, and pressed it.

"Come back," he said, laughing. "We're in Clarges Street, and we're going to be married to-morrow."

Meg looked up with startled eyes. "Are we?" she said.

"My dear, practical mystic, we are." He caught her round the waist and looked at Hadassah as he spoke. "You'll get her ready, won't you?"

She laughed. "Well, if you really mean it, I think we must all be up and doing."

"If!" Michael cried. "With this in my pocket, I should rather think I do mean it!" He brandished the special license in the air. "Do you know what this means, Meg? It's your death-warrant. Are you resigned? Have you anything to confess? You've not been married to anyone else while I was away?"

Margaret shook her head. He had brought laughter back to her eyes. Just at that moment the ex-butler entered the room. As they all turned to look at him, he said:

"A person has called to see Miss Lampton."

"Who is it?" Margaret said. Her thoughts flew to her

dressmaker, who was hurriedly making a light frock, bought ready-made, the proper length for her; in all other respects it fitted her.

"I don't know, miss. She has a box in her arms."

"Oh, I'll go," Margaret said. "I won't be long."

"Then, while you're gone, I'll make use of my time," Michael said as he rose to his feet. "I'll be back in ten minutes." He looked into Margaret's eyes. "Don't waste any time on dressmakers, Meg! Wear any old things,—you always look delightful."

"Catch me wasting time!" Margaret said. Her eyes assured him of her words. "Come upstairs for me in ten minutes—I'll be ready."

. . . . .

A minute or two later Margaret returned to the sitting-room. Michael had left it. She was glad.

"Hadassah," she said, "listen. The most extraordinary thing has happened. Millicent Mervill is up in the drawing-room." Margaret was trembling with anger and nervousness.

"What? That woman here? How has she found you, how dare she come to see you?" Hadassah's voice was indignant, furious; her eyes flashed.

Margaret hurriedly explained to her how for the last two days she had felt that someone was following her, a dark figure, indistinctly dressed in black.

"She watched me in the square this morning. With her old cunning, she managed to get in by bringing some corset-boxes with her. Smith thought she had come to try something on. Isn't it like her?"

"Have you seen her?"

"No, not yet. She gave this note to Smith to give to me; he thought it was just a list of the things she had brought. I knew her handwriting the moment I saw it. Please read it."

Hadassah read the letter. It was very short.

"DEAR MISS LAMPTON,

"If you will let me see you, I will tell you something which you ought to know. Please don't refuse. What I know may greatly help Mr. Amory.

"I only heard the other day that he never discovered the treasure. It is about that I want to see you.

"Yours,

"MILLICENT MERVILL."

When Hadassah had finished reading the note, she raised her eyes; they met Margaret's.

"You had better see her." Hadassah spoke quickly.

"Yes, I must, I suppose. I only wanted to know if you would mind—it is your house. I think it's such impertinence."

"Of course not. But what can she have to tell you?"

"I don't know, but whatever it is, I do wish she hadn't come." Margaret sighed. "We were all so happy, and she is associated with everything that is hateful."

"Would you like me to come with you?"

"No, no." Margaret shook her head. "I am always best alone, but I dread the interview."

She paused for a moment or two before leaving the room. She was building up her courage, trying to subdue her nervousness. As she went out, Hadassah's eyes followed her.

"Poor girl!" she said to herself. "She has gone through so much. I thought she was in for a little time of peace and happiness. Poor Margaret!" She sighed. "And what is there still before her?" Hadassah's eyes looked into the future, "with this cruel, cruel war only beginning, for we are really just getting into it!"

She had been preparing to write some letters relating to Margaret's affairs, but for a moment or two she did not take up her pen. A little of the truth of what did actually happen to Michael on the battlefields of Flanders swam before her eyes; it was just the things which were happen-

ing and have happened to England's brave boys and men during these three wonderful years. The war was still in its infancy, but even then the vices of Germany were as old as her race and as terrible.

She pictured the truth—Michael's charmed life, his reckless courage, his magnetic power over his men. She foresaw it all. His temperament foretold it, his absolute belief in the triumph of righteousness.

While Hadassah was thinking these things, and thanking God in her heart that her husband, by reason of his special qualifications, had at once been placed in a post of great responsibility and one far removed from the danger-zone, Margaret had reached the drawing-room. She paused for a moment outside the door; she needed all her self-control.

As she entered the room, and before she had closed the door behind her, a slight figure, so shapelessly enveloped in black and closely-veiled that she could not distinguish any individuality, turned from the window, which opened into a small glass recess full of ferns and flowers.

Margaret did not hold out her hand; she could not. Nor did Millicent Mervill; she stood before Margaret, her head bent and her hands clasped in front of her, a slight bundle of drooping black, as mysterious as any veiled Egyptian woman.

"You have something to tell me?" Margaret said. In spite of her anger, the humility of the fragile figure brought a suggestion of pity into her voice. The radiant beauty whom she had steeled her nerves to meet had given place to this meek, formless penitent. "Please put up your veil—I can't see you." She knew that she could not trust the woman's words; she wished to watch her eyes while she spoke.

"I am wearing it," Millicent said, "because I can't bear you to look at me, to see how changed I am. Please let me keep it down, while I tell you all I know about Mr. Amory and the treasure."

"What has happened?" Margaret said. Millicent's voice was agonized.

"I had smallpox in Alexandria—it has left me hideous. Soon after I last saw you I sickened with it. I was very, very ill."

"Smallpox!" There was genuine sympathy in Margaret's voice. "Are you really disfigured? How dreadful that nowadays you should be!"

"Yes," Millicent said, lifelessly. "I have nothing left to live for now. My looks are gone. I was very ignorantly nursed; they were kind people, but hopelessly ignorant."

"Perhaps your looks will come back—give yourself time." Even as Margaret spoke, she wondered how she found it possible to talk to the woman in the way she was doing. Only five minutes ago she had hated her, hated her so intensely that she had had to exercise great control over her passions so that she should not lose her temper in her presence. Now she felt a sincere pity for her, the poor creature. Margaret's subconscious womanhood knew the reason. It was because she could afford to be sorry for her, now that all rivalry between them was dead.

"I didn't come to tell you about myself," Millicent said. "It is nothing to you—you must be glad." She wrung her hands more tightly. "You are saying in your heart at this moment that I deserve it. So I do. I see things clearly now—I do deserve it. I brought it all on myself, everything. But I have suffered, you don't know how I have suffered."

"Sit down," Margaret said quietly, "and tell me all about it."

"No, no. You are only speaking like this because you feel you ought to, because I am now a thing to pity. You really hate me. I came to tell you that I never reached the hills, I never saw the hidden treasure, I never tried to find it." She paused. "And that your lover was never mine.

He never desired any woman but you—he scorned me, ignored my advances."

"I know that," Margaret said hotly. A fire had kindled her calm eyes; it quickened her spirit.

"But it is none the less my duty to tell you. Your lover is too fine, too loyal—he won't stoop to tell you how I tempted him. He wouldn't blacken even *my* name. He has too much respect for womanhood."

"Then why tell me?" Margaret said. "I don't want to hear it. All that is past. We are going to be married to-morrow—Michael is home from the Front. We are perfectly happy—don't recall it all."

A cry rang through the room. Its tone of envy and passion convinced Margaret that even in the worst human beings there is the divine spark. It actually hurt her that her own joy should mean this agony to another woman.

"You are going to be married," Millicent said, "to the finest lover and the truest gentleman I have ever known, or ever shall know, the finest in the world, I think."

"Yes," Margaret said. "He is all that, and more—at least, to me."

"Much more," Millicent said, "much more. And will you tell him that I never reached the hills, that I am not guilty of that one meanness?"

"Then who did?" Margaret said quickly.

"Oh, then you thought I did? You thought I robbed him of his discovery? Does he think so, too?" Her voice shook. Her curious sense of honour scorned the idea.

"No, no," Margaret said. Her love of truth made her speak frankly. "He wouldn't believe it. He is still convinced that you never went to the hills, that you are innocent."

"But you believed it?"

"Yes," Margaret's voice was stern. "Yes, I believed it for a time."

"I have nothing worth lying for now," Millicent said bitterly; "so what I tell you is perfectly true. I never

reached the hills; I was too great a coward. I fled away in the night, as fast as I could, back to civilization."

"Then who anticipated Michael's discovery? It's absurd to assume that someone who knew nothing of his theory should have discovered it at the very same time, almost. Do you expect me to believe that?"

"My dragoman told me that one of my men absconded. He left me on the same night as I left Michael's camp. He must have discovered it; he must have heard the saint telling Michael all about it." She paused. "You know the whole story, don't you? All about the saint, and how his illness turned out to be smallpox?" She shuddered at the very mention of the saint.

"No," Margaret said. "I haven't heard about the smallpox. Was that how you got it?"

"Indirectly, yes, but it was my own fault. When I heard that he had got it, I stole away in the night, I left Michael to face it alone." She paused.

Margaret held her tongue. There was something so horrible about smallpox that, in spite of the woman's cowardly behaviour, she felt some sympathy for her.

"He had begged me to go before the saint turned up. I wouldn't. When the saint appeared he forgot almost everything else, and so for one whole day I remained confident in the belief that he had taken my presence for granted. And then," she shuddered, "he came to tell me that the holy man had smallpox."

"And you forgot your love?" Margaret said.

"It was swallowed up in fear, in anger. I was so furious at Michael's rash generosity. I had warned him that the man might be suffering from some contagious malady, but I never dreamed of smallpox."

"It was horrible!" Margaret said. "And Michael has never said a word about it."

"His charity is divine," Millicent said. "It is Christ-like, if you like."

"It is true charity, for it is love, love for everything which God has created."

"He is so happy that he can afford to love almost everything and everyone."

"He is happy because he loves them."

"I don't believe he has ever heard of hell," Millicent said. "His religion's all heaven and beauty and love."

"Hell!" exclaimed Margaret. "But surely," she paused, "surely we're not primitives, we don't need the fear of such impossible cruelties to keep us from doing wrong? His great saint, or reformer, Akhnaton, had no hell in his religion, and he lived, as you know, centuries before David. Even Akhnaton realized that human beings create their own hells. The other hell, of fire and brimstone, which terrorized the ignorant people into obedience and order, belongs to the same category as the crocodile god and the wicked cat-goddess Pasht, of Egypt. It was necessary in its day."

"You and Michael live on such a high plane!"

"Oh no, we don't. You know Michael is very human—that is why he is so understanding, so forgiving."

"He will never forgive me—that would be expecting too much. But I had to come and tell you all that I know about his treasure. I have only just heard—I saw it in the Egyptian monthly Archæological Report—that Michael never had the glory of discovering the Akhnaton chambers in the hills."

"You didn't know that when I saw you in Cairo?"

"No, I never dreamed of it. If you had only told me that he hadn't, I should have explained, I should have told you about the man who absconded."

Margaret looked at her searchingly, but she could learn nothing more than the voice told her, for Millicent's veil was still covering her disfigured face.

"I never wished to rob him of the honour of the discovery. If I had known when I saw you, I should have cleared my name, at least, of that contemptible deed."

Margaret blushed. "I couldn't tell you." she said. "I

was too unhappy, too angry. I didn't want you to know of our disappointment. I pretended that I had heard from Michael."

"You led me to suppose that he had discovered it."

"I know," Margaret said. "I didn't wish to add to your satisfaction by telling you of his disappointment. I was convinced that you knew, and that you had slipped off to the hills." She paused. "We were bluffing each other."

"I was incubating smallpox. I was wearing a blouse and skirt which had been packed with the clothes I wore in the desert. Probably it had come in touch with some infected thing."

"Were you very bad?" Margaret said. "Where have you been all this time?"

Millicent shivered. "I was just going to sail for England, but I was too ill when I reached Alexandria to go on board the boat—I had to stay behind. I have been hiding myself from the world ever since. Yes, I was dreadfully ill, and now. . . ." Her voice broke. "You don't know what I feel when I look at myself—my own face makes me sick."

"I am so sorry," Margaret said. "You were so beautiful, such a wonderful colour!"

"How kind of you to say so!" Millicent's voice left no doubt of her feeling of shame, although Margaret's nobility was beyond her understanding; it humbled her. "I came to you because I wanted to do what I can to undo what I have done. If Michael had known that my servant anticipated his discovery, it might have given him a clue as to where the treasure has gone. You do believe now that I never saw the jewels? I never dreamed of robbing him!" She paused. "In my poor way I loved him. I couldn't have done that—not that."

"And yet you were so horribly cruel! You knew a great deal about men. Michael is only human, and he is so ready to believe the best of everyone."

"Yes, I know. But I suppose I was born bad, born with

feelings you don't understand. Michael did his best to help me; he tried to awaken something higher in me. I suppose you won't believe it, but he has—he has helped me; I am not quite what I was. While I was ill, when I thought I was dying, all that he had ever said to me came back to me with a new meaning. I determined that if I got well I would tell you everything—how wonderful his love for you is, how strong he can be—and it is not the strength of a man who does not feel."

"Oh, I know it," Margaret said. Her voice was resentful.

"But please let me tell you, even if you do know it. It is only right to Michael—I must exonerate him, even if you resent hearing me speak of his love for you. Let me make a clean breast of it, show you how ignorant he was of my plans for meeting him. He never was more surprised in his life."

"I didn't mean to resent it, but there are some things we never need telling, things which are better left unsaid. Michael needs no telling that you never stole the jewels, for instance, that you never tried to reach the hills."

"Stole the jewels! No, I never stole them. You thought that?" Horror was in Millicent's voice. "You thought I stole them for my personal use? To wear them?"

"It would not have been so cruel as to steal my lover, would it?"

"It would have been less difficult."

"You tried—oh, how you tried to steal him! How could you?" A revulsion of feeling hardened Margaret. Her eyes showed it. She was visualizing Millicent in all her former beauty. Even without beauty, she knew how strongly her vitality would appeal to men. Despondent, in her drooping black shawls, Millicent was keenly alive still. Margaret had always felt her vitality; she knew that men felt it. It stirred them to conquest; it invited contest.

Millicent answered her truthfully. "Because I am bad, not good, and I loved him with the only kind of love I know.

It swept aside all scruples. You can't judge—try to believe that—you can't begin to judge. I lived for conquest and men's admiration, and now I have lost both."

Margaret felt humbled to the dust. Her judgment had been so crude, so narrow. She realized that the woman before her left her far behind in the matter of vitality, passion and self-criticism. Her energy and vitality demanded an outlet, an object.

"Don't feel like that," she said gently. "Your looks will come back. Do let me see your face. It is early days yet—the marks will disappear, grow fainter. It is only one year—give it time, forget all about it in hard work, and while you are working, Nature will be working too."

"No, no!" Millicent cried. "Never! I am going to fly from my friends—I am going to hide myself."

Margaret had attempted to raise her thick veil, but Millicent refused to let her. Instead, she threw another thickness of it over her face. Her pride could not stand even Margaret's pity and comforting words.

"I am humbled enough as it is," she said. "Don't do that."

"I didn't want to humble you," Margaret said. "I only thought, and I do still think, that you are exaggerating the change in your appearance. One sees every little thing about oneself so clearly. I know how a wee spot seems like a Vesuvius when it is on one's nose. With smallpox the marks do get more and more invisible."

"No, my looks will never come back," Millicent said miserably. "And for a woman like me, when her looks are gone, what is there left?"

"Work," Margaret said. "The war will make you forget all about personal things—it will, really. Life is different now. If you will only take up some war-work—and I know you will, for every able-bodied woman in England is working at something; every superfluous woman has become a thing of value—life will be completely changed. There is only one idea, one aim for us—to win the war.

You must do your bit. It is just our 'bit' that keeps us sane, for without it we should have time to think. We women must not think, we must work."

"But what can I do?"

"Almost anything," Margaret said. "You know you could—you are so clever."

"Don't flatter, please," Millicent said. "How can you be so forgiving?"

"I suppose because I'm so happy. As soon as ever you can," Margaret said, "take up some work which necessitates using all your brain, all your energy. You will become so interested in what you are doing that you will forget your troubles. I had no time to grieve over mine when I was working in the hospital. At night I was so tired out that I went to sleep as soon as my head was on the pillow. The atmosphere of work, the awfulness of this war, makes personal things very trivial—one grows ashamed of them."

"You are trying to give me hope," Millicent said. "It is so big and kind of you, but honestly, I only came here to tell you about your lover, not to talk about my hideous self. What does it matter what I do? You were always a worker —I was not."

"Well, you have told me about Michael, and now I can at least try to help you. I have seen the effect of almost a year of the war on the idle women of England. It is wonderful! And we used to be called superfluous!" Margaret laughed proudly.

"You believe me? You know that I am not lying? that I never reached the hills? that I never knew that Michael had not discovered the treasure?" Millicent had gone back to the original object of her visit. What Margaret had advised seemed to her impossible.

As she said the last words, the door opened and Michael entered the room. He had heard Millicent's voice. His eyes were fixed on Margaret. The tableau created by his unexpected entrance was tense, painful.

Millicent turned her head away and hid her face in her

hands. Her first thought was that he must not see her face. She flung herself down on the sofa.

Margaret became deadly pale, but remained motionless. Michael looked from her to Millicent with an expression of horrified surprise on his face. He had expected to see her in all her perfection of toilet and looks, her shining head, the "golden lady," instead of which a bundle of crêpe, a mere armful, something soft and black, lay face downwards on the sofa before him.

"What are you doing here?" he said sternly. "Haven't we seen the last of you yet?"

Margaret put up her hands as if to ward off his words. Her own happiness had made her feel more pity than anger for the miserable woman, who for probably the first time in her life was trying to act honourably and courageously. The security of love made her wondrous kind.

"What has she come for?" Michael demanded. But for his sunburn, his face would have been as white as Margaret's own. The sight of Millicent's cowering figure brought back to him, with the quickness of light, the evening in the desert when he had flung her from him in his agony of temptation.

"She came to give us some information, Mike. Tell him, Millicent, why you have come."

Millicent took no notice of Margaret's words. She was crouching on the sofa, her face still buried in her hands.

"No, no," she moaned, when Margaret again urged her to speak. "I only wanted to tell you. Ask him to go away—do, please, beg him to go. If he wants you I will disappear and never come back again. I have said all I have to say."

"I am going to stay here," Michael said, "until I hear what you came to say. Was it necessary to come?" He looked to Margaret for his answer.

"It was better," Margaret said. "She never reached the hills, she never saw the treasure."

Michael started. "Go on," he said. "That is not all—

she need not have come to tell us that. I never accused her; I never believed it. I thought that after all she did do, she would have had shame enough to stay away."

Millicent's body quivered. His words lashed her.

"One of her servants ran away—he left her the same night as she left your camp," Margaret said. Again Michael saw the black figure shiver as Margaret spoke of her cowardly act. The very mention of it brought to both their eyes a vivid picture of the surroundings which had witnessed their last meeting. Millicent knew that Michael was seeing it as clearly as though they had been standing together under the golden stars, the tents dotted about on the pale night sands. She could hear the sick man reciting *suras* from the Koran in sonorous tones.

"And she thinks he found the treasure?" Michael said the words absently, as though his mind was occupied with distant visions.

"Yes—he was a likely character to do the deed."

"Does she know anything about him—where he went to?"

"No, Mike, but I do." Margaret spoke gently. "Millicent has been very ill. She only heard yesterday that the Government had anticipated your discovery. She came to try and help you. She is in trouble." Margaret's voice told Michael more than her words.

"She scarcely deserves your pity," he said. "Only her own heart knows how she has tricked us both . . . there are some things one cannot forgive . . . Millicent knows."

The black figure slipped from the couch to the floor. "Look, I will kneel at your Margaret's feet," she said in tones of abject shame. "Tell her everything. Tell her what a beast she has been kind to. She ought to know." She raised her head. "I think I shall enjoy the agony—anything but this living death."

She pressed her hands on Margaret's feet. "I am far worse than you knew! You are not made like me, you won't even understand if he tells you the things I did."

"I don't wish to speak of it to Margaret," Michael said.

"Get up. I have seen your penitence once too often to believe in it now—get up."

"Oh," Millicent moaned, "I know, I know! You think this is just another bit of the old Millicent. It isn't—it is true."

"Get up," Margaret said kindly. "I was only trying to be kind because . . . well, perhaps it is because I am so happy myself that I can afford to forgive you. Don't kneel like that . . . I hate to see you. Michael knows how little I deserve it . . . I have hated you with all my heart and soul, I have longed for my revenge."

"My God!" Michael said quickly, "I hate to see the little coward near you! How dared you come? Get up!" he said again. "And clear out! I thought we had finished with you for ever!"

Millicent dragged herself to her feet. She stood before him, a slender, nun-like figure; one of the black shawls which enveloped her had fallen to the floor.

"Go on, say all you feel—I deserve it, every word of it! I left you to your fate when you were in danger, I fled from the camp with but one idea in my head—my own safety, my desire to get as far as I could from the infection of smallpox. I carried the hateful disease with me; I am so disfigured that you must never see. Never!" Her words ended in a low cry of self-pity.

"My God!" Michael said. "Are you speaking the truth? Did you get smallpox?" He knew that the blame was partly his.

"Yes, but don't look at me. I can't bear it. Anything but that, oh not that!" Michael had stooped to raise her veil.

His eyes met Margaret's. "Poor soul!" he said. "Poor little soul!"

"Yes, fate has punished me," Millicent said. "You can do no more."

Michael groaned. "We have not talked of it all yet,

Margaret," he said miserably, "the horror of the small-pox."

"Millicent has told me about it, Michael." She tried to smile. "It is a thing of the past. What good will talking do? We are happy again."

Millicent turned to Michael. "I have told her a very little," she said. "And now I have something which I must tell you. When I saw her in Cairo I told her that I had been with you, I told her that you would write to me, I inferred that you and I were lovers."

Michael bent his head. He was innocent of any deed of unfaithfulness, but what of his desires? What of the night when Margaret's presence had saved him? He wondered if she was conscious of the part she had played in his renunciation.

"And you still trusted me?" Michael's words were so full of gratitude and wonder that Margaret's veins were flooded with happiness. How greatly he had been tempted!

"I remembered my promise. More than once it seemed to me that I succeeded in being very near you."

Her eyes questioned him. He understood; his eyes answered her.

"I told her that I had been with you," Millicent said, "but not for how long. She never dreamed that my coming was quite unknown to you, that I was with you for so short a time, that you hated my presence in the camp. How well she knew you!"

Margaret turned to Michael. "Yes, I knew him," she said. "Thank God, I knew him! We learnt to know each other in the Valley, and I think I realized the situation better than you thought I did."

"But I must tell you, I must show you even more than you dream of how true and loyal he has been."

"No, no, please don't," Margaret said. "Michael has told me all I want to know." She was sorry for Michael's embarrassment; he writhed under the whole thing.

Millicent paid no attention to her words. She repeated

the story for Margaret's benefit. Michael turned away impatiently. He had meant to tell Margaret all the details of his life in the desert when they were married and alone together.

"As I told you," Millicent said, "I met him in the desert. I had found out where he was going to. He was furiously angry . . . he wanted me to go back. I stayed against his wishes. The saint turning up the same day as I did made him forget me. I often tried to win him from you . . . and I thought I was succeeding. The only reason he didn't turn me out of the camp was because of my equipment and food—they were good for the holy man, who was ill. He was sickening with the smallpox, only we didn't know it. Michael took him into his camp. I told you about that. We didn't know what was the matter with him, but Michael behaved like an angel to the lunatic. When he discovered that he had smallpox, I implored him to leave him. When he wouldn't I fled. That very night I left him alone, even though I had told him that I loved him—I had offered myself to him. I took all my luxuries with me. I was mad . . . furiously angry. He had taken the sick man in against all my entreaties; he had scorned my love. The next morning Hassan told me that one of my men had deserted, left our camp at dawn."

"Stop, that's enough!" Michael cried. "Stop it!" Every word had lashed his nerves and brought back to his memory his own struggles, his own weakness.

"I fled," Millicent went on, not heeding his interruption. "I spent some weeks in Upper Egypt. I thought I had escaped the horrible disease. . . . I thought Hassan had taken every precaution. He sent some of my boxes straight on to Cairo; I opened them the night I saw you. They must have carried the infection—that is how I got smallpox. It lay in wait for me." She paused, breathless, and then went on excitedly: "I know nothing about the treasure. I am absolutely innocent in that one respect. I can tell you nothing more, nothing."

As Millicent ceased speaking, Michael took up her story.

"Margaret," he said, "some days after she left us the saint died. When he was buried, we moved on. As he spoke, he visualized the desert burial. "We journeyed to the hills. On our way we passed through a subterranean village—a terrible place, of flies and filth! The *Omdeh* of the village, a fine old gentleman, told us of the growing unrest among the desert tribes—German work, of course; we are seeing the fruit of it now. I paid no heed to him; I felt too ill, too tired. I only cared about reaching the hills. When we did reach them, we found that a camp was already established. Information had been given to the Government." He heaved a deep sigh. "The thing was out of my hands. I suppose the shock finished me for the time being, for when I left the excavation-camp I became ill, so ill that Abdul had to take me as quickly as he could to the *Omdeh's* house near the subterranean village. I stayed there until late on in May." He stopped abruptly.

"The rest won't bear speaking about. What made things so much worse, Meg, was thinking about what you would be suffering, what Freddy would be saying." His eyes sought Margaret's. "It is best to forget, it is wiser to think of to-morrow."

"Yes, let us forget all about it," Margaret said. Michael's expression frightened her. As a soldier he had enough to bear without raking up what was past.

"Abdul became as dear to me as a brother," Michael said quietly. "His devotion was wonderful! We are not of the same faith"—he was speaking to himself—"but our God is the same God, our love for Him the same. Abdul knew that."

"And your illness?" Millicent said. "Was it smallpox?"

"No, no—none of my camp caught it. It was enteric fever. I suppose I was worn out, both mentally and physically. The disappointment about the treasure was the last straw, it was so cruel. I am able to accept it now, it doesn't hurt me any longer. The war has done that; the war is

like concentrated time—it obliterates and wipes out, and even heals."

"But you discovered it, Michael! You were the real discoverer. If it hadn't been for you, and for your special knowledge, the man who stole it, who gave the information, would never have found it. And, above all, as Michael Ireton says, that is the main point of interest." Margaret's eyes glowed with pride. "And haven't you heard the sequel to that tragedy?—the finding of some ancient jewels which the thief must have dropped in the desert, not so very far from the hill-chambers?"

As Michael had not heard that the gems had been found, Margaret told him the story which Hadassah had written to her.

"They prove, Mike, what after all is to us the most important fact in the whole affair—that you were right, that all the information given you by the seer was correct."

Margaret did not include her vision of Akhnaton in Millicent's presence; it was always a sacred subject between them.

"That is what Abdul said, and I know it is true. But who can prove it? To the disbelieving no one can prove that there was any treasure, any gold or great wealth of jewels." He looked into Margaret's eyes. He said plainly, "Freddy died unconvinced on that point."

Margaret understood. She had so often wished that Freddy could have known all that had transpired since his death.

"I will spend all my money and wits on finding the wretch," Millicent said humbly. "I will hunt this treasure to earth. If there were jewels, they shall be found. I will never stop until I have traced them, never! That will give me some interest in life—if you will let me do it, that is to say."

"The jewels will all be cut by this time, the gold will be melted. No one will be able to recognize them."

"You can't find the thief," Margaret said. "He died of

smallpox—Mr. Ireton heard that from the Government authorities. They set detectives on his track, and discovered his whereabouts, but he was unconscious. They think that he buried the treasure, that it is again lost to the world. It is still waiting for you, Mike."

"I know that there were many more jewels where the crimson and amethyst came from," Michael said, "whether they are ever found again or not." He was thinking of the words of his old friend in el-Azhar. If he came out of the war alive, he might again hope to discover them.

"I can do something else," Millicent spoke pleadingly. "Say you will let me! I am rich—my money is no good to me."

Michael looked at her for an explanation. His eyes were cold.

"I can spend some of my money in paying the expenses of the digging, for excavating on the site. The war will put a stop to all excavating work in Egypt and the Holy Land so far as England is concerned, but if I give sufficient money, you can employ the best Egyptologists in America, so that the work can go on this autumn. You will not have to wait until the war is over before you find out all there is to be known on the subject."

"The papyri will prove a great deal," Michael said; "they found papyri." Millicent's words scarcely penetrated to his brain. He was obsessed with the idea that the Egyptologists suspected that the treasure was again buried. If it was, how exactly it all tallied with the African's vision!

"I believe that there is very little excavating work to be done," Margaret said. "I have had so little time with Hadassah that I have not even referred to the subject." She smiled, surprised at the fact when it was brought before her. "But in a letter she told me that the chambers were singularly perfect. They are cut in the virgin rock; they are not extensive, but nothing had been destroyed. One of the chambers was evidently intended for a royal treasury."

"In Flanders," Michael said, "life is very real." He turned to the window as he spoke; Margaret's news had troubled him. "Germany has made all our lives horribly real. What you have told me seems to belong to another state of our existence." His eyes were far away from either Margaret or Millicent; they were with his comrades in the trenches. "When I was knee-deep in mud in the trenches I often thought that our hut-home in the silent Valley was a dream, a beautiful dream, one of those dreams we can never forget, however long we live, but only a dream."

He drew himself up. "We have been brought back to firm earth. Our apprenticeship on this side isn't finished, Meg. We aren't ready to fully understand the things beyond. While we are on this earth, I believe it is wiser to rest content with the things that are here." He smiled. "Perhaps Freddy is right—it is wiser to walk on our two feet."

"Perhaps it is," Margaret said wistfully. "But thank God I trusted to the progress of one person who occasionally walks on his head."

While Michael's back was turned to the door, and Margaret was looking at him with eyes of sympathy, and with the knowledge in her heart that he was living over again scenes and actions in Flanders which left her far behind him, Millicent had slipped from the room. With her white corset-boxes in her arms she fled downstairs and silently opened the front door. As silently it shut behind her.

For a moment she paused, before descending the steps. London was there in front of her, London with its luxuries and its sins, which not even the strength of Germany or the sacrifice of young lives could obliterate. The spring made no call to her; the sunshine mocked her because of her empty world.

. . . . . .

When Michael and Margaret discovered that she was gone, they stood for a little while locked in each other's

arms. As Margaret raised her head from Michael's breast, he bent his head and kissed her lips.

"Dearest," he said, "you and I can afford to forgive her, poor lonely little soul!"

"I can forgive anybody anything, Mike."

"Even the Kaiser, beloved woman?"

Margaret shivered. "Don't let's think of him—not for eleven days, at least."

"We shall be able to be sorry for even him some day," he said. His confident tones delighted her, for his mention of the war had brought the angel with the flaming sword into her Eden.

"You really think so, Mike? Your inner self feels it? Sometimes I almost despair—they are so strong, so clever."

"I do believe it," he said. "You foolish woman, of course I believe it. The day may be a long way off, but it is coming, just the same. The triumph of light over darkness, Meg, the old, old fight—we shall see the resurrection of Osiris and the defeat of Set all over again. The sun of righteousness will stream over the world when the devil of militarism is crushed for ever."

He kissed her again rapturously. Their time together was so short; it left them little opportunity for lengthy talks on any subject. The way in which Michael broke off in the middle of his sentences to make love to her, and question her eagerly and impetuously, suggested the hosts that disturbed his mind. He wanted to tell her all about the old African's idea of the meaning of the war, and about his visualizing of the treasure for the second time; but he wanted still more her lips and her own exquisite assurances of her love for him, the eternal subject, which neither age nor war can affect. The one important fact which could not wait was that to-morrow she was to be his wife, and if he did not let her return to her preparations, there was the possibility that some hitch might occur. So they went back to Hadassah and told her all that had happened.

For everyone concerned the rest of the day flew on wings. Each hour passed like a flash. Bed-time came, and Margaret scarcely seemed to have achieved half or quarter of the things she had meant to do.

A telegram had arrived, in answer to hers, from the aunt with whom she had lived as a child and young girl. The bride-elect had felt just a little worried about her aunt; she had written her a letter which she would receive on her wedding morning. In it Margaret had told her all about her friendship with Michael while she was living with Freddy in Egypt, and of Freddy's friendship with him, which was of a much longer duration. Also, she took pains to assure her aunt that, as far as pedigree was concerned, he had the blood of Irish kings in his veins.

## CHAPTER IV

THEIR wedding-day was the sort of day which made Browning, when he lived in Florence, sing:

"Oh, to be in England
Now that April's there. . . .

. . . . . .

"And after April, when May follows,
And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows . . ."

Margaret said the words to herself as the day greeted her when she pulled up her blind in the morning.

London, even in war time, was inviting and charming for such as drove about the West End in taxis, for they had not yet disappeared from the highways and byways. The day was clean and fresh and sweet-smelling. The promise of brilliant sunshine in the midday hours made the fashionable streets near the Iretons' rooms very busy and gay. Khaki-clad figures were everywhere; some were accompanied by daintily-clad girls, proud of their soldier lovers;

others were walking with portly old gentlemen, their generous grandfathers or godfathers, most probably; while many of them had given themselves over to their mothers for the morning. Nor were they, as they would have been in the days of peace, embarrassed by their affectionate grasp of their arms and the unconcealed adoration and love.

. . . . . .

Things had happened with such bewildering rapidity that Margaret drove through the streets to the church in which they were to be married in a sort of open-eyed dream. She saw with extraordinary vividness all that was going on around her, even to the faces of the boys and girls who passed them in taxis; but she was incapable of concentrated thought. The hurry and excitement in which she had lived for the last two days left her breathless and vague.

She was driving with Michael Ireton, who was amazed at her outward calm. He little knew that the bride whom he was to give away was physically and nervously almost exhausted. The sudden end of the strain which she had endured so long had produced a dreamlike phase of almost semi-consciousness.

Margaret knew that Michael was ahead of her, in another taxi with Hadassah. She also knew that they were driving to the church with the outside pulpit which stands a little way back from the road in Piccadilly. She had always felt a special attraction for the quiet courtyard, right in the hurly-burly of one of the main arteries of London. She knew that she would have to say her responses in the marriage-service. Yet somehow she felt more like another person looking on from a great distance at the doings of someone else. One would feel the same remoteness if one was saying to oneself, "At this very moment Margaret will be getting married, she will be on her way to the church."

"Here we are," Michael Ireton said abruptly.

The taxi had stopped at the iron gate in the centre of the railings which guarded the precincts of the church. He jumped out quickly and Margaret followed him. In the

porch of the church they stopped for a moment, to make sure of the fact that Michael was waiting to receive Margaret at the chancel steps. Then, still in a dream-state, Margaret walked up the aisle of the church on Michael Ireton's arm. She was not nervous; things were too unreal for her to be conscious of being nervous.

A few idle Londoners, seeing that there was going to be a wedding, had strayed into the church; otherwise it was empty. Michael thought it rather dark and solemn.

Margaret was daintily dressed in white, a frock suitable for travelling. Michael was still in his Tommy's uniform.

Nothing could have been simpler than the service which made them man and wife, or more unlike what Margaret's aunts would have considered suitable for their niece. It was a wedding after Michael's and Margaret's own hearts, a solemn sacrament of two people, not a society gathering of critical guests.

It was not until Michael took Margaret's hand in his, and pressed it eagerly and firmly, with an air of happy possession, that Margaret came to her full consciousness and to the significance of what she was doing. She had repeated her vows after the clergyman clearly and correctly; she had even said "I will" because her subconscious mind had impelled her to say it. The importance of the words had escaped her. It had been only her material body which stood by her lover's side.

Michael felt her air of aloofness, her distance. Her eyes had not met his when he had sought them, eager to welcome her. She had walked up the aisle and taken her place by his side like a spirit-woman, who was a stranger to him.

When at last his strong hand clasped hers, she looked up. Their eyes met. A long sigh travelled from Margaret's awakening heart to her lips. Michael felt her emotion. He held her hand more possessingly, as he said, very clearly:

"I, Michael Amory, take thee, Margaret Lampton, to be my wedded wife."

He tightened his grasp on her hand. Its dearness and magnetism affected her. Her feeling of somnolence vanished. Things became real, tremendously real and wonderful.

Michael was saying the words, "to love and to cherish until death us do part."

At the word "death" Margaret's throat tightened. Something seemed to almost choke her. The words made her visualize the blood-soaked fields of Flanders. Weak tears filled her eyes; the loudness of her heart's beating made Michael's next vow, "according to God's holy ordinance," almost inaudible. The din of battle thundered in her brain. Death was going to part them almost directly; it was standing behind them now; it had been coming nearer and nearer for the last four months; it was only waiting until Michael had left her, until she was no longer near him. Like an avalanche crushing down upon her from a great height, the terror of death swept over her. Just as a shot from a rifle, or the vibration of a body of men marching under a precipice of loosened snow, will bring it down and cover them, the words "until death us do part" had overwhelmed Margaret.

Then a strange thing happened. As Michael said proudly and distinctly, "And thereto I give thee my troth," Margaret saw that he was surrounded by a brilliant light. He stood in the centre of long shafts of sunshine; they played round his head like the rays of Aton. Her terror of death vanished as swiftly as it had come. This was the light which guarded Michael in battle. A super-elation dispersed the thought of the brief married life which might be hers, that she might be stepping into widowhood even while she repeated her vows.

Bewilderment made her forget her part in the ceremony. She felt, but did not see the clergyman take her hand from Michael's. He separated them for a moment and then put her hand on top of Michael's. He whispered something to her. Then she remembered her part, and said slowly and

clearly after him the same words which Michael had repeated. The words "until death us do part" were said as she might have said them in pre-war days.

After that she was free from all nervousness and all sense of unreality. She saw Michael take the ring from the clergyman's fingers and hold it in his own hand. She smiled to him happily, as she saw his expression of relief and tenderness. In one moment more they would be man and wife; no distance or grief could change that.

When they knelt together for the first time as man and wife, and listened to the words of the beautiful prayer that they might "ever remain in perfect love and peace together," Margaret's happiness made her prayer a song of praise. If it was ordained that Michael was to be spared to her, how simple and natural a thing it would be for ever to remain in perfect love and peace together! Loving each other as they did, that would not be one of their difficulties. It was so restful to kneel side by side with Michael, listening to the gentle and solemn words, that she would have liked the prayer to go on for a long time. Her nervous condition made her apprehensive. Here, in the quiet church, which lay right in the heart-beat of the city, there was a divine sense of security.

Their heads were bent together; their arms were almost touching; their heart-beats were in unison; their minds were one.

But the prayer was finished. Michael's hand had clasped hers again; he was far more conscious of his part in the ceremony than she was of hers. He held her hand as if it was his world, the kingdom he had come into, while his eyes expressed his emotion and gratitude.

As the words "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder," and "I pronounce you man and wife," echoed through the chancel, Michael Ireton and Hadassah gave a pent-up sigh of relief.

When the clergyman turned to the altar and read aloud the sixty-seventh Psalm—Michael had requested it in

preference to the hundred and twenty-eighth, which is perhaps the more usual—Hadassah saw the bride and bridegroom smile happily to each other. They smiled, because Michael had often read the Psalm to Margaret and remarked on its similarity to the prayers of Akhnaton.

"God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and show us the light of His countenance, and be merciful unto us;

"That Thy way may be known upon earth: Thy saving health among all nations.

"Let the people praise Thee, O God: yea, let all the people praise Thee.

"O let the nations rejoice and be glad: for Thou shalt judge the folk righteously, and govern the nations upon earth.

"Let the people praise Thee, O God: yea, let all the people praise Thee."

"Thou shalt govern the nations upon earth." That had been Akhnaton's mission, to preach these words, to tell the people that God, and man's understanding of His Love, must rule the world.

"Then shall the earth bring forth her increase: and God, even our own God, shall give us His blessing."

Akhnaton had sung his Hymn of Praise in his temples and in his pleasure-courts of his city in almost the very same words.

Confident that righteousness would triumph, that God's world-kingdom had come, he suffered the wrath of his military commanders, who were watching the breaking-up of his kingdom in far-off Syria.

. . . . .

Two hours later the bride and the bridegroom, the two happiest people in London, drove away from the Iretons' rooms in Clarges Street. Hadassah and Michael Ireton watched them until the taxi was out of sight. As they turned into the hall, with something very like tears in her eyes—for even in the happiest marriages there is the qual-

ity of tears—Michael put his arms round his wife and drew her to him. As she looked up into his rugged face, his eyes more than his words said:

"We know how they feel, dearest! God bless them! Such happiness makes one weep in these days."

Hadassah pressed her dark head against his coat-sleeve. He held her closely; each day she was more precious in his sight.

"They are worthy of each other." His voice broke. "Really, when one sees such happiness, one says to oneself, even if they have only a fortnight together, it is a great deal, a wonderful thing."

Hadassah looked at her husband searchingly. "Somehow I've no fear for Michael—have you?"

Michael Ireton thought before he answered. "No, I don't think I have."

"There is a certain something about some people that makes one either afraid or not afraid for them—the men going to the Front, I mean. For Michael Amory I haven't any fear. I can't explain why—it's not that he will save himself by caution." She laughed.

"I know," her husband said. "Michael seems extraordinarily lucky. He told me a few things last night, of the escapes which he daren't tell Margaret, ghastly adventures. I'm afraid he's awfully rash. Like all Irishmen, when his blood's up, he hasn't any conception of the danger he's facing. He has the super-bravery of the Celt, and all his recklessness."

"I just hope that as a married man he will keep that supernatural nerve. A wife often destroys it."

"I know," Michael Ireton said. "One sees it so often—No wife, no danger—a wife at home, more caution, less nerve."

Hadassah was silent. Her husband's arms were still round her. He kissed her passionately.

"I feel like a bridegroom myself! Seeing Michael stand-

ing there waiting for Margaret brought our wedding-day back to me." His eyes caressed her.

"Did you notice the wonderful light that suddenly surrounded them just as Michael took Margaret's hand in his, when he said, 'And thereto I give thee my troth'? The church had been rather dark and dreary up to then; all at once the sun streamed right down on them. It was really quite extraordinary, just as if an unseen hand had turned on the limelight. It was almost uncanny."

"I noticed it," Michael said.

"The effect was startling. I wondered if Margaret noticed it—it surely was a happy omen?"

Her husband smiled into her eyes. "I feel sure that Michael's subconscious self would be saying the grand words of his beloved Akhnaton:

"'Thou bindest them by Thy love.
Though Thou art afar, Thy rays are upon earth;
Though Thou art on high, Thy footprints are the day.'"

FINIS

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